

## § II. DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

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## § II. DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

### Lecture 1

## Introduction to General Revelation

Last time, we introduced the subject of Christian doctrine, the importance of Christian doctrine, and the importance of studying Christian apologetics. Now we want to move into our first unit of this course, which is on the Doctrine of Revelation.

### *Introduction*

#### **The Question of Authority**

We'll introduce this subject by raising the question of authority. What do we mean by "authority?" Well, authority is the right to demand belief and obedience. The person who has authority has the right to demand belief and obedience. So, for example, in a family structure, parents have authority with respect to their children, to demand that the children do certain things and obey their parents. But that's only a subsidiary authority. Obviously there are higher authorities over the parents. There are authorities of the state and the job, and there are higher authorities than those. But ultimately we have to get to the final court of appeal, the highest authority beyond which there is no higher authority. That will be God himself. God is the supreme authority, who has the right, as the supreme authority, to demand belief and obedience unconditionally from us.

So the practical question becomes, then, how do we discover God's will and mind? If God is the ultimate authority who directs our lives, commands us to live in certain ways, and requires us to believe certain things, how do we know God's will and mind on any subject, so as to follow his authority? Well, the answer to that question is revelation. Revelation is the disclosure of God's will and mind on something.

#### **Definition of Revelation**

Now what do we mean by the word "revelation?" Revelation means the unveiling of something hidden so that it may be seen and known for what it is. Revelation is disclosure of something, the uncovering of something. In this case, it will be God's mind and will on any particular subject. This raises a certain definitional problem because if revelation is the unveiling of something that would be otherwise hidden, then that would seem to imply that much of the Bible really isn't revelation, technically speaking. This was something that troubled theologians in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when biblical criticism first began to arise. What they began to discover was the human element in Scripture, that a good deal of Scripture is not prophetic utterances from the Lord, *e.g.*, "Thus sayeth the Lord," some sort of revelatory word coming through the prophets. A lot of Scripture is things like Paul's letter to Philemon, where he's just writing as an ordinary human author would write, or the Gospel of Luke, where Luke talks about how he went and interviewed eyewitnesses and ministers of the Gospel about the Jesus tradition so that he could write it down. It wasn't as though Luke and Paul had some revelation to their minds disclosing some otherwise hidden truths. Rather the facts that Luke discovered about Jesus were

public knowledge; they could be found out by anyone who cared to do a historical investigation. And many of Paul's letters were not revelatory in that sense. They were about ordinary matters of church life that many people could know about. So if we think of revelation in this narrow sense, it would seem that a lot of Scripture isn't really revelation, and yet usually we think of the Bible as being God's revelation.

Similarly, it wouldn't make sense to talk about general revelation in nature because the whole point of general revelation is that it's not hidden – it's open, it's generally available.<sup>1</sup> So rather than deny that the Bible is revelation and thereby engender all kinds of misunderstandings, it is helpful if we distinguish between two senses of the word "revelation" – what we might call revelation in a sort of broad sense and then revelation in a more restricted sense. In the technical, restricted sense of disclosing something that is hidden, only certain parts of the Bible would be revelation. For example, the Book of Revelation would be revelation in that restricted sense. John sees a vision from God which reveals to him what is going to come. And so he calls his book the Apocalypse or the Revelation of what's going to happen. Or in 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul talks about Christian worship services where prophets would speak, and he says that if a revelation is made to someone else, then let the others be quiet so that they can hear what is being said. This would be revelation in the narrow sense of a disclosure of something that is hidden. But we also use the word "revelation" in the broader sense of a communication from God. It is in that sense that I think that the Bible is God's revelation to us and that God reveals himself in nature. It is a communication from God. So we call the Bible the "Word of God" because it is a word of God to us. It's his communication to us. So we must not be misled by confusing these two senses of "revelation" – broad and narrow – or it could lead to some serious misunderstanding.

## DISCUSSION

*Question: (inaudible)*

*Answer:* I want to resist that idea. I do think that the Holy Spirit can illumine the Bible in special ways to us when we read it – a passage can become meaningful to us in a certain situation – , but I don't want to say that the Bible becomes revelation or can become more revelatory. I think, as we'll see when we get into the doctrine of inspiration, that the Bible *is* God's Word. It *is* revelation from God in the sense that it is a communication from him to us. It doesn't *become* revelation; it *is* revelation in this broad sense of a communication from God.

*Question: (inaudible)*

*Answer:* OK; again, I just want to resist your use of "revelation" here to characterize this disclosure of illuminated passages of Scripture. I don't think that these are on the same plane as God's revelation of Scripture to us. So I think it is quite right to say that the Holy Spirit applies the Scripture to our heart, he illuminates it for us, but the idea that God is in the business to giving private revelation to people that would be comparable to Scripture makes me very uncomfortable. I do think that there are prophets who can get revelations

<sup>1</sup> 5:00

from God, but I would distinguish that from the sort of subjective, inner sense that many people often have that “God is speaking to me” or “God is telling me to do this.” I don’t think we should call this revelation.

*Question: (inaudible)*

*Answer:* Well, I think that what you have to understand is the background of this. Later we’ll look at this a little bit more. Many of these theologians or divines had a very wooden understanding of Scriptural inspiration, almost akin to dictation. They thought that it was almost as though the Bible had been dictated by God. This is what Muslims believe about the Qur’an. The Qur’an is dictated from Allah to Muhammad. There’s no human element in it at all. So when scholars began to discover the human elements in Scripture, that these documents reflect the education and the circumstances and the weaknesses and the tempers of their authors, many of them found this very difficult to reconcile with the idea that Scripture is an inspired revelation from God.<sup>2</sup> That’s why I want to distinguish these two different senses of “revelation” because I think that they were quite right in saying that not all of the Bible is revelation in the narrow sense. Some of it is, like the Book of Revelation, but not all of it. That doesn’t mean that it’s not revelation in the broad sense, that it isn’t God’s Word to us in the sense that He’s communicating to us via the Scriptures. We’ll see how this works itself out when we get to some of the theories of inspiration.

*Question: (inaudible)*

*Answer:* That’s the real danger, isn’t it? Someone says, “I got a revelation from an angel and, therefore, I don’t need the Scripture; I don’t need the Bible.” You will often hear people say things like, “Well, God revealed to me that I am married to the wrong person and that I really should be married to this other person, and, therefore, it is justified to get a divorce. God wants me to be happy, and He’s revealed it me.” I’m not kidding! This is the way some Christians reason, and it’s a result of not really understanding the nature of revelation.

*Question: (inaudible)*

*Answer:* Very nice! That is exactly the middle knowledge perspective on divine inspiration that I will defend later in this class. So you are already anticipating me. I will argue that, in fact, we can believe that the Bible is God’s Word to us verbally, plenary, and what’s called congruently (it’s both the Word of God and the word of man), and yet it is God’s Word to us precisely because of God’s knowledge of how a Paul would write if he were in such and such circumstances and called upon to write an epistle to the church in Rome. So hang on to that – that will be the view I will defend.

## ***General Revelation***

Now let’s say a word about general revelation. There are two types of revelation that are often distinguished. What I said above does not describe two *types* of revelation; rather it was two *definitions* of “revelation” – broad and narrow. But there are also two types of

<sup>2</sup> 9:59

revelation. One is called *general revelation*, and the other is called *special revelation*. Don't confuse these two types of revelation with the two definitions of "revelation" broad and narrow.

## Two Senses of "General"

What do we mean by general revelation? There are two senses in which there is a general revelation of God. One sense would be that it's *generally available*. That is to say, it is not restricted to certain people or certain times and places in history. This is a revelation that is available to all of humankind. It is general in its scope. But secondly, it's also general in that it provides merely *general information* about God. On the basis of God's general revelation in nature and conscience, people can know that there is a Creator of the universe who has enormous power; but they won't know that He's a Trinity, and they won't know that he became incarnate in Jesus Christ. So general revelation gives only general information about who God is, not specific information. So there are two senses of general revelation, generally available and then general information.

## Types of General Revelation

Now how does God reveal himself generally to us? Well, in Paul's letter to the church in Rome, he talks about two ways in which God is generally revealed. The first way is in nature. In Romans 1:18-20, Paul talks about how God has revealed himself to all humanity through the created order. He says in Romans 1:18-20,

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 on the basis of nature alone, all persons everywhere at any time in history can know that there is an eternal Creator who is a powerful deity that has made the world. Moreover, in Romans 2:14-16<sup>3</sup> Paul says that this Creator has implanted his moral law in the hearts of all persons. Romans 2:14-16 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 the requirements of God's law are written on the hearts of all people, even non-Jews who don't have the Mosaic Law, and therefore they do by nature what the law requires. There's a kind of common moral code that permeates the world's societies that is rooted in the conscience of man. Paul says that our conscience bears witness and tells us what to do and what not to do. Therefore, all persons everywhere through God's general revelation can know that there is an eternal, powerful Creator of the world before whom we are morally responsible and, based on what Paul says in Romans 1, morally

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<sup>3</sup> 15:00

guilty and whose forgiveness we need. That can be known by anybody anywhere. That's God's general revelation in nature and conscience.

What we'll do next time is look at the functions of general revelation and then talk a bit about the relation of general revelation to arguments for God's existence before looking at special revelation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Total Running Time: 17:11 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § II. DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

### Lecture 2

#### Functions of General Revelation

We began last time by discussing two different concepts of what revelation is – a broad concept and a narrow or more restricted concept. In the broad sense, “revelation” means a communication from God. It is some sort of a word or communication that comes from God telling us something. In a narrower sense, “revelation” means the unveiling of something hidden, the disclosure of something not known. It is important to keep these two senses distinct because while the Bible is revelation in the first sense and God’s disclosure in nature is revelation in that first sense (*viz.*, a communication from God), not all of the Bible is a revelation in that narrow sense, that is to say, a disclosure of something unknown or previously hidden. Prophecy would be an example of that; the Book of Revelation in the New Testament would be an example of that. But much of the Bible, like Paul’s letter to Philemon, is not a disclosure of hidden, secret information from God and therefore isn’t a revelation in that narrow sense, though it is in the general or broad sense.

Now in addition to that distinction concerning the definition of “revelation,” I also made a distinction in the types of revelation. This is different than the definition. The definition of “revelation” is either broad or restricted (narrow). But then there are two kinds of revelation: general and special. I explained that general revelation is general in two senses. First, it provides information about God that is generally available to all persons in human history, regardless of the time and place in which they have lived – it is generally available. Also it is general in a second sense, namely, it is general information about God. It doesn’t tell us that God is a Trinity; it doesn’t tell us that Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins. It is general in the sense that it tells us that there is a Creator God of the universe who has made the world and to whom we are morally responsible, but it doesn’t tell you a whole lot beyond that in terms of specifics. We saw that in nature and in conscience God is generally revealed in this way.

So general revelation primarily assumes the form of God’s disclosure in nature – that is, in the creation around us – and then also in conscience, as God’s moral laws are written on the hearts of all people so that everyone has an innate sense of our moral responsibility before God and of our failure to live up to the demands of the moral law.

#### Functions of General Revelation

We come now to point 3 of the outline, which is the functions of general revelation. What function does general revelation serve?

1. *To show forth God’s glory.* First of all, it shows forth God’s glory. Psalm 19:1ff:

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 thinks of the creation around us, particularly the heavens and the stars and planets at night, as showing forth the glory of God. It is not verbal, there aren't any audible words spoken, and yet in a sense this message of God's creative power and glory goes out to the whole world. So one of the fundamental functions of general revelation is to show forth and manifest God's glory in the creation.

2. *To render people morally culpable before God.* Secondly, general revelation renders people culpable before God. I mean morally culpable or morally guilty. Look at Romans 1:19 and then 2:16. 1:19 says, "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them." Paul is speaking here about God's revelation in creation: what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them.<sup>5</sup> And then in 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.

So there he says that what can be known about God is evident through his general revelation, men have a moral law written on their hearts, and on the day of judgment, when God will judge the secrets of men's hearts, they will be judged by their own conscience, which will accuse or excuse them based on how they lived up to the standard of God's moral law.

So on the basis of general revelation people are indicted before this Creator of the universe as morally guilty, as sinners, as persons that are in need of his forgiveness and moral cleansing. Jack Cottrell, in his book *What the Bible Says about God the Creator*, has a section on this function of general revelation in making people culpable before God which I shall read to you, page 342 and following:

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. 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

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<sup>5</sup> 5:26

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>6</sup>

So as a function of creation, the function of general revelation is to show forth God's glory, to manifest his existence and his moral law to creatures. This serves to render people culpable before God because they haven't lived up to the standard of general revelation by which God will judge persons who have never heard the Gospel of Christ. So this provides some answer to those who ask, "But what about those who never heard the Gospel?" The answer is that they will be judged fairly on the basis of the information they have, not on the basis of information they never received.<sup>7</sup> They will be judged on the basis of general revelation. This is information for which they are responsible, and they are culpable for their failure to live up to it.

3. *To make salvation through Christ universally accessible.* The third point is that it does seem to me that through general revelation one could have access to the salvation wrought by Christ. Here I think I would probably disagree somewhat with Prof. Cottrell. It does seem to me that through general revelation those who have never heard of Christ can have access to the salvation that Christ has won on the cross. Look at what Romans 2:6-7 says, "For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life." I take that to be a *bona fide* offer that is extended to all persons everywhere. If someone will follow the guiding of general revelation and seek for glory and honor and immortality, God will give him eternal life.

Now does that mean that these people can be saved apart from Christ? No, not at all! It would simply mean that the benefits of Christ's atoning death could be applied to these people without their having a conscious knowledge of Christ. This happened all the time in the Old Testament. Look at Old Testament figures like Job, Melchizedek, and Abimelech in Genesis 20. Here you have what are sometimes called "holy pagans" of the Old Testament. These people, when you read the stories about them, evidently had personal relationships with God. Job clearly was a man in whom God delighted. Job was a righteous man. Similarly, Melchizedek was called the priest of the Most High. Abimelech received communication from God, as God would disclose himself to him. And yet these persons had not only never heard of Christ, but they weren't even Israelites! They weren't even members of the old covenant, much less the new covenant! Job was from Ur in Chaldea; Melchizedek wasn't a descendant of Abraham; Abimelech was a Philistine. And yet they seem to have responded to the information that they had. What that suggests is that if a person responds to general revelation by recognizing that

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<sup>6</sup> Jack Cottrell, *What the Bible Says about God the Creator* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1983), pp. 341-346.

<sup>7</sup> 10:02

he is sinful and culpable before the Creator God of the universe and he casts himself upon the mercy of this God, confessing his sin, recognizing that he has no claim to righteousness through his own good works or holy living but casts himself wholly upon the mercy of this God of creation, that God can be counted on to respond to that person by applying to him the benefits of Christ's death.

Although that is *possible*, I think that if we take Romans 1 seriously, we have to say that not many people actually *do* access salvation in this way. So I'm not advocating some sort of broad or wide inclusivism. On the contrary, I think that Romans 1 gives us every reason to be pessimistic, and that few, if any, will be saved through general revelation. Look what Romans 1:20-25 says,

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; for 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 resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.<sup>8</sup>

The remainder of the chapter goes on to tell how God gives them up to sin and how people plunge themselves into moral degeneracy and rebellion against God. Why? – because they have rejected the truth about God which they knew through general revelation and have instead turned to serve and worship the creature rather than the Creator. So although I think it is possible for a person to have access to the salvation that Christ has won on the cross through general revelation, I'm very pessimistic that there are very many people like this. It does seem that people like Job, Melchizedek, and Abimelech might fall into this category, and I really hope that Aristotle would fall into this category. It would be great to see Aristotle in heaven someday! But I don't think we can have any sort of confidence in this. On the contrary, the abysmal ineffectiveness of general revelation is an incentive for the preaching of the Gospel and the missionary enterprise to bring the special revelation of God's Word to all of mankind.

4. *To stabilize human society.* The fourth function of general revelation is to stabilize human society. On the basis of general revelation we have a common moral code that tends to permeate human cultures, and this will provide a moral fabric for society that will prevent moral anarchy from erupting and every man doing what's right in his own eyes. So on the basis of general revelation we have a kind of stabilizing effect that makes human society and civilization possible by providing a basic moral code by which human beings can live.

So the functions of general revelation, then, are primarily, (1) to show forth God's glory; (2) to render people culpable before God; (3) to provide access to salvation for those who have never heard the Gospel of Christ; and (4) to stabilize human society.

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<sup>8</sup> 14:55

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Just to clarify, you are not going with an anonymous Christian model?

*Answer:* What do you define “anonymous Christian” to be? If you’re talking about a kind of inclusivism that would say that there are these anonymous Christians, any kind of inclusivism that is biblically acceptable would have to be extremely narrow. The people who managed to access salvation through general revelation are very few and far between, if there are any. Now those that do, perhaps you could call anonymous Christians in the sense that they are saved by the blood of Christ. They are not saved by their own good works, they are not saved through some other religion, they are saved solely by the atoning death of Jesus Christ, just as Job and Melchizedek were, though they had never heard of him. So there may be a few people like that, but I’m certainly not espousing any broad inclusivism.

*Question:* Do you take this to mean there are no true atheists deep down?

*Answer:* That’s a really good question! I do think that a person can be an atheist only by suppressing God’s general revelation and that therefore they are morally accountable. Alvin Plantinga, who has developed a model of how we know God through a kind of innate, divine sense, says that atheists are cognitively dysfunctional because if their cognitive faculties were functioning properly, they would believe in God. It does seem to me that that’s correct. As a result of the willful suppression on the part of those who know God but refuse to honor him as God, there results a kind of darkness of the mind. So these persons in their darkened intellect may sincerely believe there is no God. I’m not suggesting that atheists are disingenuous, that they really believe deep down but are faking it. I’m not suggesting that. But I am saying that this darkened intellect is a cognitive dysfunction that they have brought upon themselves by suppressing the truth that is evident to them.<sup>9</sup>

*Question:* Do you think there should be a smooth transition from general revelation to Christ?

*Answer:* When you think about general revelation, what does it give us? It gives us a sort of general or generic monotheism that would be acceptable to the Muslim, to the Jew, to the Christian, to deists (who just believe in this God of nature); there are even some forms of Hinduism that are monotheistic. So it doesn’t discriminate among any of those. It would give you a kind of monotheism, but you would still then have to ask, “Why think that this God of creation has revealed himself in the person of Jesus?” Now having said that, nevertheless, I have to say that there is a lot that general revelation excludes, too. Polytheism, atheism, Daoism, most forms of Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism – all of those are excluded because they don’t have any room for a personal, Creator God of the universe who is the source of absolute moral values and has a moral law that we are obliged to obey. So it does narrow down the world’s great religions just to these monotheistic traditions. It goes along way toward getting you to Christian theism but obviously not all the way.

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<sup>9</sup> 20:00

*Question:* Do you think as far as being saved through general revelation that that might only apply to the Old Testament?

*Answer:* Let's speak to whether or not these figures are exclusively in the Old Testament. You see, the difficulty here is that the transition from the old covenant to the new covenant takes place gradually in history as the Gospel goes out to the whole world. So if you go back to the first century, only a very few people at first had heard about the new covenant, the people living in the Mediterranean basin. But folks living in South America and in the Arctic in Canada had never heard of it –or people in China. In a few more centuries, the message had spread to more people, and more folks were aware of the new covenant. But today there is still between around 15% to 25% of the world's population that have yet to hear the Gospel even for the first time. So for this minority of the world's population, they, in a sense, still find themselves in this old covenant relationship with God or at least in the relationship that people like Job and Melchizedek were in, where they know there's a Creator God of the universe but they've never heard the Gospel of Christ or perhaps even the gospel of the Old Testament. It seems to me that that there is a kind of historical progression that takes place, so that you can't say that when Christ came, this function of general revelation ceased immediately. It seems to me that it would be something that would carry through so long as people remained in this state of ignorance, which many of the world's population still do.

*Question:* Would their salvation be based on what they worship in nature?

*Answer:* No! This is where I don't want to be misunderstood. They are not saved on the basis of what they consciously worship in their religions or because they worship nature. God forbid! That's the exact opposite of what I mean. They also can't adhere to the moral code. It is not salvation by works. Rather imagine some Native American Indian living on the Great Plains during the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. He looks up at the stars at night and the intricacies of nature around him, and he senses that all of this has been made by the Great Spirit. And as he looks into his own heart, he senses that the Great Spirit has written his moral law there, telling him that all men are brothers and that we should live in love for one another. But suppose he recognizes that he fails to do that, that he senses in his heart selfishness, hatred, that he's wronged his brothers, and he has not worshiped the Great Spirit. So in despair he flings himself upon the mercy of the Great Spirit, begging for forgiveness and moral cleansing and saying, "I have failed you! Please forgive me!" It seems to me that that is the kind of faith response to general revelation that is very similar to the faith response to the Gospel when we hear it. But he doesn't have the Gospel, so his faith response is to the information that God has given him. It seems to me that Roman 2:7 suggests that God will honor that by applying to him the benefits of Christ's death.<sup>10</sup> But again I want to hasten to say that I am not optimistic that there are a whole lot of folks like this.

*[A quick Q&A on election and predestination – Dr. Craig defers the question for a later class]*

*Question:* Would you agree with Peter Kreeft that Socrates was a Christian since he was a seeker of truth and Christ is truth?

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<sup>10</sup> 26:00

*Answer:* I don't know enough about Socrates. I think that Peter Kreeft is more optimistic than I am about the efficacy of general revelation. I hope that someone like Aristotle or Socrates might make it. But I don't think that we know enough about their hearts to be able to judge whether or not they were genuine seekers after truth that have been accorded God's salvation. I think, in general, that I'm not nearly as optimistic.

## **Relation of General Revelation to Arguments for the Existence of God**

Let's say something about point 4 on the outline – the relationship of general revelation to arguments of the existence of God. As those of you who are interested in apologetics know, one of the important subsections of apologetics is natural theology. Natural theology attempts to give arguments or evidence for the existence of God apart from the resources of special authoritative divine revelation.<sup>11</sup> So there will be arguments from design, for example, or cosmological arguments, or moral arguments for the existence of God that play a part in the project of natural theology. And the question I'm raising here is, what is the relationship between general revelation and the arguments for the existence of God that philosophers and natural theologians talk about?

Well, the question here comes down to how we should understand general revelation as described in Romans 1 and 2. Namely, is the belief in God in response to general revelation an *inference* or is it more like *perception*? Now what do I mean by that? An inference would be drawing a conclusion from several premises. You would look at the evidence and contemplate that evidence, and then you would infer a conclusion on the basis of that evidence. By contrast, in perception you don't infer something; you just see it. So, for example, my belief that there are other people in this room is not an inference. I don't say, "Well, I am having these visual experiences, and the photons are impinging upon my retinas in a way to make me see people out there, and probably these are true impressions, and therefore I can conclude that there are other people in the room." No, not at all – it is not an inference. Rather I just see that there are other people in the room. It is just a perception. And the question is, is general revelation an inference – do people see the handiwork or the fingerprints of God in creation and infer, "Aha! There must be a God!"? Or is it more like perception – you just look at the world, and you just see that "This is made by God," or "God is convicting me of sin," or something of that sort?

Well, let's look a little more closely at the passage in Romans 1 to try to get some answer to this question. When Paul says in Romans 1:20, "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature . . . has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse," you have there a kind of pun on the nature of perception. He says on the one hand that God's nature is invisible, it is imperceptible, and then he says that this imperceptible nature has been perceived in the things that have been made! So there is a kind of irony that the invisible nature of God is seen. How? Well, it is seen through the things that have been made. But in the Greek, what Paul says could be translated, "the invisible things are perceived through reflection on the things that have been made." It is by reflecting on the things that have been made that we see the invisible things of God. Moreover, the word there for "eternal" power is *aidios* (that means

<sup>11</sup> 30:02

eternal). This is a very rare word in the New Testament; it appears only two times in the New Testament. It is a Greek word that comes out of Greek philosophy that would show the links of Paul's discussion with the sort of natural theology done by the Greek philosophers. Another indication of this would be the word for "divine nature," *theotes*, which is a word that appears nowhere else in the New Testament. This is the only place in the New Testament where *theotes* appears. But it is again a Greek philosophical term for the divine nature, which seems to suggest the linkage between Paul's discussion and the kind of natural theology that went on among the Greek philosophers.

What is especially interesting, however, is the comparison of Romans 1 with a Jewish apocryphal work called *The Wisdom of Solomon*. This is a book that, although part of the Catholic apocrypha, is not in the Protestant Bible. It was not written by Solomon but is a pseudepigraphal work, that is to say, written under his name. In the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of *Wisdom of Solomon* we have a very interesting discussion of how people can tell that God exists just through creation around them. Here I think it is very evident that it is by reasoning that they do this. Let me read verses 1-9 of *The Wisdom of Solomon*:

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.<sup>12</sup>

So here in this passage you have a passage that sounds almost like Romans 1. It talks about how the people worship and serve the created things that they see around them rather than God. It says that although this is understandable because these things are so beautiful and so admirable, nevertheless in the end the author says people are not to be excused for worshipping these creaturely things because if they had this much intelligence to investigate the world, they should have also seen that God exists as the author of these things. Again in verse 5 he says from the greatness and the beauty of created things, they can infer that there is a Creator of these things. It seems that when you understand Romans 1 in its historical context, a very good case can be made that Paul is endorsing here the project of natural theology. He's saying from the created order around us, people can easily form the inference that there is a Creator God of the universe to whom we're morally responsible and, indeed, if they fail to do this, that this inference is so simple, so obvious, that they are without excuse for not doing so.

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<sup>12</sup> 36:36

In support of this, read Acts 14:17. Paul and Barnabas come to Lystra, and the people begin to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods that came down from heaven. In Acts 14:17 Paul says, “God 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.” So what Paul is saying there is that they ought not to worship Barnabas and Paul, who are just mere men, mere creatures. Rather he says the living God who made the heavens and the Earth has not left himself without a witness. And what is that witness? It is the order of nature with its fruitful seasons and so forth that testify to his existence.

So how should we understand the relationship between general revelation and natural theology? General revelation is not natural theology. General revelation is not identical with arguments for the existence of God. General revelation, rather, is the traits of the Creator in the creation. It is like the fingerprints of the potter in the clay, or the telltale strokes of the brush that let you know that this is a Rembrandt, when you look at that painting. It is the traits of the author in his created product. That is what general revelation is. Natural theology is the human formulation of arguments that tries to express this insight. It uses the data of general revelation to construct human arguments to conclude that God exists. So natural theology is a human product. It is fallible. Arguments for the existence of God get revised all the time. It is an ongoing project. While it is not identical with general revelation, it is closely related to it, in that general revelation plausibly involves a sort of inference from the created product to its creator as its author.<sup>13</sup>

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* When was *The Wisdom of Solomon* written?

*Answer:* It is an intertestamental work. It is a Hellenistic book written in the Greek language, so it is not genuinely from Solomon; but it nevertheless represents the culture milieu in which Paul wrote Romans 1.

*Question:* There are many that say Paul in Romans 1 was referring to *The Wisdom of Solomon*.

*Answer:* Yes, I don't find it at all implausible that Paul may have known the work. I mean, the literary connections are so close in the verbal similarities that I could imagine Paul had read this chapter in *Wisdom of Solomon* and here in his letter to the Romans expresses this same idea.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> 40:26

<sup>14</sup> Total Running Time: 42:29 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § II. DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

### Lecture 3

## Introduction to Special Revelation

### *Special Revelation*

We've been looking at the Doctrine of Revelation, and for the last couple of weeks we've been discussing general revelation – how God is revealed in nature and in conscience and the function that that plays and its relation to the arguments of natural theology. Today we want to turn to special revelation.

### **Sense of “Special”**

In addition to his revelation in nature and conscience, God also reveals himself to us in certain special ways. Now what do we mean when we speak of special revelation? What we mean is that God makes himself known with a clarity and fullness that surpasses general revelation. In general revelation, God is known vaguely in sort of broad outlines – there is a Creator of the universe who has planted his moral law on our hearts – , but through general revelation little else is known about him beyond that. But in special revelation, God makes himself known with a clarity and fullness that surpasses general revelation.

### **Types of Special Revelation**

What types of special revelation are there? Preeminently, there is God's special revelation in his son Jesus Christ. In the person of Christ, God himself has entered into human history and thereby given us a disclosure of what he is like. In John 1:1, 14, 18 we read,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. . . . full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. . . . No one has ever seen God; the only Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.

Here John says that Jesus Christ is the living Word of God, the one who has been with God from eternity. He is, indeed, God, and he has now become flesh and lived among us. In doing so, he has revealed to us the unseen God whom no one has ever seen before.

So Jesus Christ is the living Word of God, who reveals to us what God is like. But in addition to God's living Word, there is also his written Word, his propositional revelation in holy Scripture, that is to say, in the Bible. The Bible is God's written Word. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” Here the author indicates that holy Scripture is, itself, inspired by God. The word here means *God-breathed*. The Scripture is God-breathed; it proceeds, as it were, from the mouth of God. It is God's Word to us.

So not only do we have God's living Word in Jesus Christ, but we also have his written Word in the holy Scriptures, which are God-breathed, or inspired, by him. In addition to

these two primary forms of special revelation, we have to say that God is free to reveal himself in other ways that could be called “particular revelation.” These would be revelations that would be to specific individuals at specific times. These can be dreams, visions, or some sort of word of disclosure that God would give to an individual person.<sup>15</sup> These are not his Word to mankind in general, but a specific revelation given to a particular individual. That seems clear in the Old Testament when the prophets would say, “Thus saith the Lord,” and the prophet would give some revelation or word that God had given him to communicate. But in the New Testament as well there are prophets in the church, and “prophet” was one of the offices of the New Testament church. We find in 1 Corinthians 14:26 and 29-31 reference to the regulation of such prophets. Here Paul is describing the church in Corinth as they gather together to worship. Verse 26: “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.” So different people in the service would participate – one person would offer a hymn that might be sung, another person would speak in tongues, another would interpret, and someone else would have a revelation from God (the word “revelation” is right there in the text). Then in verses 29-31 he says,

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. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.

Here Paul, in describing the early church in worship, seems to think that there were revelations that would take place in the context of these worship services that could then be shared with the group, and the others would weigh what was said (whether it was really a genuine word from the Lord or not).

Many evangelicals think that this sort of prophetic office ceased with the closure of the canon of the New Testament. Given that we now have the written Word of God, there isn't any need anymore for this sort of prophet that is described here in 1 Corinthians 14. And, therefore, this gift of prophecy has ceased, and there aren't these kinds of particular revelations made to people today. I don't have a hard and fast opinion on this issue, but I must say that in studying the Scripture, it seems to me extraordinarily difficult to prove that these prophetic gifts have ceased. There isn't anything that I can find in Paul's instructions or anywhere else in the New Testament that would suggest that God is not free to, and does not occasionally, give a particular revelation to someone through a special word or dream or vision or something of that sort. So I think that caution requires us at least to be open to the possibility that there could be ongoing revelations of this sort. Of course, our supreme authority is going to be God's propositional revelation in Scripture itself. However, there might be legitimate claims to these sorts of particular revelation.

These are the types of special revelation that God might give: primarily through his son Jesus Christ, also his propositional revelation in Scripture, and then particular revelations that might be given to individuals on various occasions.

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<sup>15</sup> 5:02

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Can you explain verse 34 where it says, “Women should keep silent in the churches?”

*Answer:* You do bring up an issue of great controversy in the church today. I take it that we need to read these verses in their context. The context is, as I say, a description of an early home church worship service where Christians were coming together to worship the Lord.<sup>16</sup> And Paul says in this context that he wants this type of service to be led by men and that the women should remain silent in the worship service. But that isn’t to say that outside the worship service the women would not be allowed to speak. On the contrary, Paul talks about prophetesses – there were prophetesses in the early church. Philip’s daughters were prophetesses. The gift of prophecy was given to women, and they did exercise it in the early church. But apparently, at least in Paul’s churches, they did not do so in the context of the worship service. With regard to women teaching, I don’t see anything in Scripture that says that women can’t teach children or other women or even men on certain subjects. But in a different letter in the New Testament – 1 Timothy 2 – Paul says that women should not teach Christian doctrine to men. In the area of teaching Christian theology in the church, you should have men teach other men, and you shouldn’t have a woman hold a position of authority as a doctrinal teacher over men. Whether we like that or not, whether it is counter-cultural or not, it seems to me that if this is God’s standard and order that he sets down, then we should obey it and abide by it. It seems to me that God, being God, has the perfect prerogative to prescribe whomever he wants as teachers. If God were to prescribe that none of us should eat beans, for example, as the early Pythagoreans believed that we should all forswear eating beans, that would be perfectly within God’s prerogative, and in that case we should obey him and do what he says. It seems to me that however counter-cultural it might be, given the type of service that is described here, Paul would not have women prophesy in the service. They would do it outside of the service. And women wouldn’t teach doctrine to adult males but could teach to females and children or they could teach men on other subjects or share their experiences.

*Question:* How does the experience of Priscilla and Aquila relate to this?

*Answer:* That bears out exactly what I said. Priscilla was apparently a very gifted teacher. She is mentioned before her husband many times, not “Aquila and Priscilla” but “Priscilla and Aquila.” They instructed Apollos when he was erring or uninformed in his doctrine. They took him aside and instructed him more carefully in Christian doctrine. And again that seems to me to be perfectly all right because it is not done in the context of the church. It is in the context of the church that Paul is speaking here. This doesn’t mean that a woman can’t be the head of a business or a professor. He’s talking about, say, a class like this one. I don’t think that Paul would want a woman teaching a class on Christian doctrine that would include adult males in the class. He would say that you should have a man teach Christian doctrine to other men.

*Question:* If a particular revelation occurs today, it would have to harmonize with the Scriptures, right?

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<sup>16</sup> 10:12

*Answer:* That's what I would think. If someone got a particular revelation today that said, for example, "God has revealed to me that I am to divorce my husband and marry John," I would say, "Baloney!" because Jesus made it very clear that divorce is not permitted except in cases of adultery. So the person who claims a particular revelation that goes against Scripture is, in all probability, erroneous or deceived by an illusion. I do feel very uncomfortable talking about particular revelation, but it seems to me that Scripture does teach this, that particular revelations can happen. I have never had a particular revelation like that. I know friends who claim that they have or know of prophets who do speak in this way, but I have never experienced it. I think those of us who haven't had this kind of particular revelation place our trust and our stake in Scripture. If someone contradicts Scripture, that would mean God would be at odds with himself, he would be contradicting his own inspired Word, and, therefore, we would know that that would be fallacious.<sup>17</sup>

*[Q&A: Discusses John Hus and the story of his future prediction of Luther]*

*Question:* Can you comment on 1 Corinthians 13:8 where it says, "as for prophecies they will pass away, and as for tongues they will cease?"

*Answer:* Yes, these would be the verses that those who believe that with the close of the canon these gifts have ceased. So in chapter 13:8 it says, "Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away, as for tongues they will cease, as for knowledge, it will pass away." Now they interpret that to mean that it is going to pass away when the New Testament canon is closed and there will be no more prophecies. But I have to say, in all honesty, it doesn't seem to me that that's when he is imagining them passing away. Look at the rest of the paragraph: "For our knowledge isn't perfect and our prophecy isn't perfect, but when the perfect comes the imperfect will pass away." Further,

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even, as I have been fully understood.

I think he's talking about the return of Christ. That's when the perfect comes and when the imperfect will be done away with. I can't persuade myself that what Paul is talking about here is when the New Testament canon is closed. So I remain open to the charismatic gifts like speaking in tongues or prophecy or healing and things of this sort. I don't think these passages are referring to their passing away with the close of the canon; it's talking rather about the return of Christ.

## Inspiration of Scripture

We want to talk now more specifically about holy Scripture because this is the Word of God, the special revelation on which we base our lives and understanding of who God is and what he would have us do. Fundamental to the doctrine of Scripture is the inspiration of the Bible. Remember we saw in 2 Timothy 3:16 that Scripture is "God-breathed." Notice that the property of inspiration belongs not to the *authors* of Scripture but to the

<sup>17</sup> 15:10

*Scripture* itself. This is extremely important – he’s not saying the authors of Scripture were inspired; he’s saying the Scripture itself is inspired. *This [holding up the Bible] is God’s Word, this is God-breathed.* So inspiration is a property of the Scripture primarily; it is not the property of the authors of Scripture. Now we’ll see in a moment that certainly the Holy Spirit did guide the authors of Scripture, but it is critical for the authority and the infallibility of the Bible that we understand that it is the Bible, it is the Scripture, that is inspired, not simply its authors. It is God’s Word to us.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to 2 Timothy 3:16 the other key verse on this subject is 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 the author does speak of the work of the Holy Spirit on the authors of Scripture, particularly on the authors of prophecy. He says that when they spoke, they did not do so by their own natural impulse, but rather they were moved by the Holy Spirit. The Greek word here means that they were *carried along*, they were *borne* by the Holy Spirit, so that what they spoke is from God. Inspiration means that the authors of Scripture are moved by the Holy Spirit to speak or write in such a way that what they compose is the Word of God to us. It is inspired and is from God. That’s what inspiration means.

### **Extent of Inspiration**

Let me say a word about the *extent* of inspiration. Typically, evangelicals or orthodox Christians have maintained that the extent of inspiration is the full breadth and depth of Scripture. That is to say, Scripture is inspired in a *plenary* way. That speaks to the breadth of inspiration. To say that Scripture is inspired in a plenary way means that all of Scripture is inspired. It is not as though just the doctrinal parts of Scripture are inspired, not just the prophetic parts, but all of Scripture is inspired, including even the seeming trivialities, like Paul’s greetings at the end of his letters or his commands to someone to bring his cloak that he left behind. All of Scripture is inspired by God, as it says in 2 Timothy. So the inspiration of Scripture is plenary in its extent.

Secondly, it is *verbal* inspiration. That speaks to the depth of inspiration. It is not just the ideas in Scripture that are inspired or even just the propositions in Scripture that are inspired, but the very *words* of Scripture are inspired. Down to the very *words* these are the words of God to us. So the very words that an author of Scripture uses are God-breathed. These are God’s words to us, though they come through the human author. Many times you will find the authors of Scripture appealing to or quoting from passages of the Bible where they will appeal to a single word to make their point. This shows the depth of inspiration – a single word can make a doctrinal difference in certain cases when the authors of the New Testament are writing and quoting passages of the Old Testament. Scripture is inspired, it is God-breathed, all of it, the entire extent, and down to the very words that the authors chose to use.

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<sup>18</sup> 20:11

There is a third property of Scripture that is difficult to reconcile with these two, and that is that inspiration is *confluent*. “Fluent,” as when someone is fluent in a language, means to “flow;” “con” is “with,” as when you are with something. So *confluent* is the property of Scripture that it is both the product of the human author and the product of God.<sup>19</sup> It is both a human word written by, say, Zachariah or Haggai or the Apostle Paul or Luke. It is a human word. But it is also God’s Word to us. This is an inspired Word.

What this forces us to think about is theories of inspiration: how is it that Scripture can be plenary, verbal, and confluent in its inspiration?

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Does “confluent” mean a common understanding among the authors of what is to be written?

*Answer:* No, “confluent” means that this Word, this product, flows both from a human author and from a divine author. It is not to say that the human author understands all of what he may be writing. The passage in 1 Peter talks about how the prophets who wrote in the past often didn’t fully understand the things that they were saying because they were prophesying about Christ and may not have realized it. So it is not to say that there is a single depth of understanding on the part of both the human and the divine author, but simply that Scripture is the product of a divine/human synthesis.

*Question:* Would you consider Christ’s birth as part of natural theology, since it was a part of history, but it becomes part of the special revelation when you come to realize who he is?

*Answer:* That is a very good point. Here you do begin to see the boundaries blur because as a real, historical individual, Jesus of Nazareth can be investigated by any secular historian, and facts about his life can be established. I think you are quite right. In that sense there is a kind of general revelation in so far as Christ is a historical figure. On the other hand, such knowledge is not generally available to mankind and confers more than just general knowledge of God. In that way it is special.

*Question:* [makes a comment about how the Bible inspires and reveals itself to a person]

*Answer:* I want to say that we shouldn’t ever lapse into this kind of language of “the Bible’s becoming God’s Word for me,” or “When I read it, it becomes God’s Word for me because God speaks to me through it.” I think that’s quite incorrect. God could speak to you through the telephone book or through *The Shack*, but that wouldn’t make it God’s Word. The Bible is God’s Word. The whole idea is that the Bible is a propositional revelation. If it were lost, forgotten in some vault, and nobody ever read it, it would still be the God-breathed, propositional revelation of God. So let’s not lapse into this language of the Bible’s becoming God’s Word to me or anything of that sort. That is to diminish the degree to which this is a verbal, propositional revelation from God.

*Question:* How do we take these ideas you are talking about but avoid the idea of dictation?

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<sup>19</sup> 25:15

*Answer:* That is the next subject – theories of inspiration! How can revelation be plenary, verbal, and yet confluent? That’s the question that we are going to need to tackle. I think that a lot of Christians did once believe in the dictation theory of inspiration. They will actually use the word “dictation.” Those who are fans of these theologians will say, “They didn’t mean it literally; they were just using that as a means of saying how specific and correct is God’s Word; but they didn’t mean it was literally a dictation.” But when you read the writings of some of these early church fathers and even some of the Protestant Reformers, they did seem to think of it as some kind of dictation. Sometimes they would compare God’s playing upon the human author the way I would play upon a lyre and I would pluck the strings of a lyre to make it produce a certain sound using a pick. They would say the Holy Spirit is like God’s pick and the human author is like the musical instrument, and God plucks the strings of the human author to make him produce the words that he does. This is very much like dictation. While this is exactly what Islam teaches with respect to the inspiration of the Qur’an, that really doesn’t get you a confluent inspiration in the way we Christians want to affirm.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Total Running Time: 32:06 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § II. DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

### Lecture 4

## Theories of Inspiration

### Theories of Inspiration

We come to our section on theories of inspiration. This material will take us into some fairly deep waters, and you are going to really need to put on your thinking cap! But I promise you that if you stick with me, it will be understandable, and, moreover, I believe that this can shed a light on the Bible that will make you see it in a new way in which you have never perhaps seen it before.

So let's take a look at the theories of inspiration. Basically, there are really two theories of inspiration that compete. The first one would be the *dictation* theory of inspiration. Dictation theory says that God simply told the authors what to write, and they were at best stenographers. They just wrote down what God dictated. This is the Muslim theory of inspiration for the Qur'an. The Qur'an is a dictation, a recitation, which Mohamed simply records. This theory might seem on the face of it inadequate because after all the Bible doesn't read like the work of one author. It reflects the human personalities and education and different circumstances of the various authors. It doesn't sound like a dictation from one person. But those who would defend dictation would say that God accommodates himself to us by speaking in human terms. It would be, to use John Calvin's analogy, the way we speak with a little baby. We will sometimes do baby talk when we are playing with a little child. Calvin says that when God talks to us he lisps, he condescends, to speak in our categories and with our vocabulary. So the dictation theory would have to involve some sort of accommodation like that. After all, God has already accommodated himself to reveal himself in Hebrew and in Greek. He has already adopted human forms of speaking. So why couldn't he go even beyond that?

Hardly anyone holds to dictation theory anymore today, however, because it doesn't really seem to take seriously the human aspects, or the humanity, of Scripture. The Scripture is a confluent revelation. It is the product not merely of God but also of the human authors. To treat the authors as merely stenographers and to say God simply accommodates himself by speaking in human style doesn't really give a proper place to the human authors of Scripture. The Scripture also has various elements in it that don't seem to be dictations. For example, there are the trivial elements in Scripture. The trivial things that are mentioned seem to be just reflections of the historical circumstances of the author. For example, in 2 Timothy 4:20-21, Paul gives some personal information and instructions: "Erastus remained at Corinth; Trophimus I left ill at Miletus. Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren." Now are we to say that God dictated to Paul to write that? That Eubulus greets you? These seem to be trivialities that are only relevant to the people in the time who actually got the letter and don't seem to be things that we imagine that God dictated. There are also elements in Scripture that express the emotions and anxieties and the depression of the human authors, and it seems implausible to attribute those to God's

dictation. These seem rather to be genuine human emotions that are being expressed. This comes out especially clearly in the so called imprecatory Psalms. Certain Psalms in the Old Testament have passages that are very difficult to understand if you think of them as dictations from God.<sup>21</sup> Imprecatory Psalms are Psalms in which curses and disaster are called down upon the people who are opposed to the Psalmist. For example, Psalm 139:19-22:

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.

This seems so contrary to what Jesus said about loving your enemies, and the Psalmist here is saying how much he hates them. It is hard to think of this as something that is dictated by God rather than a genuine expression of the Psalmist's anger and indignation of those who opposed God.

It is for these kinds of reasons that virtually no one holds to the dictation theory anymore. Rather what folks want to hold to would be the second theory, which we would call the *supervision* theory of inspiration. This is the theory that God superintended the writing of Scripture by sovereignly guiding the authors of Scripture so that they would write God's Word to us. They would express it in their own terms, their own language, and their own feelings; it would be a genuine human writing, but nevertheless this would be so superintended or supervised by the Holy Spirit that what they wrote would be God's Word to us. On the supervision view, it is not surprising that there might be trivialities like greeting someone: it is not that God dictated to Paul to say those things, rather it is just that in the supervising work of the Holy Spirit, God knew that Paul would send these greetings and that's O.K. with God, and, therefore, this is part of God's Word. The imprecatory Psalms can express the genuine feelings of the author, and these are something that represent God's Word, but it is the human author's emotions that are expressed. It is not saying that we should have similar emotions – it's not teaching us how we ought to feel.

The supervision theory would be the theory that contemporary defenders of inspiration would hold today.

## **The Apparent Incoherence of Plenary, Verbal, and Confluent Inspiration**

### **The Problem**

The problem, however, is that there really isn't any explanation given here of *how* this can take place. How can the Holy Spirit supervise the writing of Scripture so that the human authors freely write what God wants them to write? How can you say that the Scripture is verbal and plenary in its inspiration and yet is the free product of human activity? That leads to this objection: the apparent incoherence of plenary, verbal, and confluent inspiration. The problem is, how can inspiration be verbal and plenary, how can the very words of Scripture be inspired by God, and yet also be the product of free human

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<sup>21</sup> 5:00

activity? How can the Holy Spirit supervise the writing of Scripture so people freely write words that are God's words to us?

When you read many theologians on this, they don't have any answer to this at all. They are at a loss. Here are three quotations from some representative theologians. The first is from John Henry Newman, a very highly respected Catholic theologian of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Listen to what he says about this problem:

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>22 23</sup>

That is a very eloquent statement of the problem that Newman admits he has no solution for. He simply affirms the humanity and the divinity of Scripture.

It is not better on the Lutheran side. Look at the next quotation from Robert Preuss, a very prominent, contemporary Lutheran theologian. He says:

The Lutheran doctrine of inspiration presents a paradox. On the one hand it was taught that God is the *auctor primaries* of Scripture, that He determined and provided the thoughts and actual words of Scripture and that no human cooperation concurred *efficienter* 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; 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 . . .

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<sup>22</sup> 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.

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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 probe the mystery of inspiration beyond what has been revealed. The Lutheran teachers are well aware that there is a lacuna in their theology at this point. . . . ; and they are content to retain this logical gap and accept the paradox.<sup>24</sup>

So he is saying you just live with the paradox, just live with the mystery.

Finally, what about Reformed theologians – Calvinist theologians – as in the Presbyterian Church? B.B. Warfield, one of the great Reformed theologians, wrote the following. The classical doctrine of inspiration, he says,

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>25</sup>

So here, again, they accept the humanity and the divinity of Scripture, but as to how this could happen, well, this is draped in mystery, and they do not know the answer.

This is the problem that we confront. If you want to have a supervision theory of inspiration, how is it that the Holy Spirit can produce a revelation which is verbally, word for word, God's revelation to us, and yet this is done through the free, spontaneous authorship of human writers?<sup>26</sup>

### **Biblical Inerrancy and the Problem of Evil**

This problem came to the attention of a number of Christian philosophers, and an argument for its solution was given by Randy and David Basinger in an article published in the *Evangelical Quarterly* in 1983.<sup>27</sup> What Basinger and Basinger are arguing is basically that if you believe in a doctrine of biblical inerrancy and you believe in human free will, then this is going to imply a dictation theory of inspiration. Inerrancy plus human freedom gives you a dictation theory of inspiration. Really, inerrancy isn't the issue as you read their article; it is really verbal inspiration that is the problem. It has to do with how the very words of Scripture can be God's Word to us if the human authors have freedom.

You might think that they are arguing in favor of the dictation theory, but, no, they aren't. You would be missing their point. Rather what this argument basically is is an argument *against* verbal inspiration. This is because what they will say is: since nobody believes in

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<sup>24</sup> Robert D. Preuss, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 2 vols. (St. Louis; Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 1: pp. 290-291.

<sup>25</sup> Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* (Oxford University Press, 1931; rep. ed.: Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1981), p. 62.

<sup>26</sup> 15:08

<sup>27</sup> Randall Basinger and David Basinger, "Inerrancy, Dictation and The Free Will Defence," *Evangelical Quarterly* 55 (1983): pp. 177-180

the dictation theory, therefore you have to give up either human freedom or biblical inerrancy. But no one is going to give up human freedom, so what goes out the window is biblical inerrancy or verbal inspiration. The subtext is that this is really an argument against verbal inspiration because if you believe in verbal inspiration and human freedom, you are stuck with a dictation theory of inspiration, and that is a non-starter, since no one believes that theory.

How does their argument go? It is in six steps. This is the argument that they first present in favor of biblical inerrancy – this is the way they imagine someone would argue for biblical inerrancy:

1. The words of the Bible are the product of free human activity.
2. Human activity, such as penning a book, can be totally controlled by God without violating human freedom.
3. God totally controlled what the human authors did, in fact, write.
4. Therefore, the words of the Bible are God's utterances because God controlled what the human authors freely wrote.
5. Whatever God utters is errorless.
6. Therefore, the words of the Bible are errorless.

So this would be the way they might imagine you would argue for biblical inerrancy. You would argue that God can superintend the composition of a book through free human agency so as to produce an inerrant, verbally inspired product. What they then go on to argue, though, is that if you buy into this line of argument for biblical inerrancy, you can't use the Free Will Defense to respond to the problem of evil! The Free Will Defense against the problem of evil goes like this, "Why is there so much evil and suffering in the world? It is because of human freedom. Human beings have rebelled against God, they have sinned, and therefore the world is fallen, and that is how you explain evil. It is because of human freedom." But what Basinger and Basinger say is: you can't use that anymore if you believe premise (2) in the above argument for biblical inerrancy (the premise that states that human activities can be totally controlled by God without violating human freedom). If God can totally control things without violating human freedom, then why has he produced a world in which people sin and fall away and evil exists? Why didn't he produce a world of free creatures where everybody always does the right thing and the world isn't fallen? If you are going to use the Free Will Defense to avoid God's being the author of evil, then you cannot hold onto premise (2) – you can't say that human activities can be totally controlled by God without violating human freedom. So, they say, given the reality of human evil and the fact that God cannot be the author of evil, premise (2) has to be false. It is false that human activities can be totally controlled by God without violating human freedom. The only way he can totally control people would be by violating their freedom.

But then that produces the following argument:<sup>28</sup>

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

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<sup>28</sup> 19:38

2'. (This is the new, replacement premise) Human activities, and their products, cannot be totally controlled by God without violating human freedom.

Then they add the following conclusions based on this new premise (2'):

7. The doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible entails God's total control of the words of the Bible. (These are the very words that God wants to be in the Scripture.)
8. Therefore, the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible is false.

Why is the doctrine of verbal inspiration false? Because God cannot control what free persons will do, and therefore, given human freedom, he cannot guarantee what these authors would write. They go on to say, if you persist in affirming the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration, then since premise (7) is true (that is, the doctrine of verbal inspiration entails God's total control of the words of the Bible), you have to deny premise (1), which means you must agree that verbal, plenary inspiration implies a dictation theory of inspiration, which is to deny confluence (the human aspect of Scripture along with the divine aspect).

Basically they give you a dilemma. You are either going to have to give up verbal inspiration or you are going to have to give up confluency. You will have to buy into dictation (which no one wants to do) or you will have to give up verbal inspiration.

### Geisler's Response

Norman Geisler, in a subsequent issue of the *Evangelical Quarterly*,<sup>29</sup> responded to the Basingers by saying that there is a hidden assumption in their reasoning, which is premise (9):

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

In other words, Basinger and Basinger are assuming that if God can so control the authors of Scripture that they freely write the words he wants them to write, then that means he can control everybody so that nobody ever sins and everyone does the right thing. They are assuming that if God can control certain persons so that they freely do what he wants, then he can do that for everybody. Geisler thinks that that just isn't necessarily true, that premise (9) is false. He says,

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.

Now I think Geisler is on the right track in responding to Basinger and Basinger. But notice what Geisler's argument presupposes – it presupposes that God has *middle knowledge*.

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<sup>29</sup> Norman L. Geisler, "Inerrancy and Free Will: A Reply to the Brothers Basinger," *Evangelical Quarterly* 57 (1985): pp. 347-353.

## A Middle Knowledge Perspective

“What in the world is middle knowledge?” you may be wondering. This will be addressed more fully when we get to the Doctrine of God and the doctrine of omniscience, but here is a little capsule summary of what middle knowledge is. Middle knowledge is the doctrine that God knows not only everything that *could* happen or everything that *will* happen, but he also knows what any possible person that he might create *would* freely do under any possible circumstances in which God might place him. Geisler’s paragraph here, or solution, presupposes that God has that kind of knowledge. An omniscient God would know those kind of facts, so he knows, for example, what Pontius Pilate would do with Jesus if he were the procurator of Judea at the time of Christ. He knows what Judas would freely do if he were one of the twelve disciples and were tempted to sell Jesus out for thirty pieces of silver, and so forth. God knows what every possible person would freely do in any possible set of circumstances he might place him in.

So when it comes to producing a verbally inspired Bible, what does God need to know? He simply needs to know who would freely write a certain piece of writing if he were in a certain set of circumstances. So by creating that person and placing him in just those circumstances, God guarantees that that person will write what God wants him to write.<sup>30</sup> So if God wants to produce the book of Romans, all he needs to do is to create a Paul of Tarsus, place him in exactly those circumstances, and Paul will freely write the book of Romans with no consciousness of divine dictation or superintendence or anything of that sort. Remember: inspiration is not a property of the author; it is a property of the text. It is the text that is inspired; the text is God-breathed. But when you have middle knowledge, you need virtually no action of the Holy Spirit on the person if that person would freely write in those circumstances what God wants him to write.

On this perspective it is perfectly imaginable that God would have been happy if Paul had chosen to use certain synonyms rather than the very words that he used. God would not have been upset if he had chosen to greet somebody else or if he omitted talking about leaving Trophimus ill in Miletus. Now God knew that he would write that, and that’s fine. So God allows him to write that, and this becomes God’s Word to us. But it is not to say that God dictated to Paul that he had to write these things.

Similarly, in the Psalms, God allows the human author to have the full range of his expression: the anger, the despair, the anxiety, the doubt that comes out in the Psalms. These are all genuinely human emotions, not dictated by God, and God allows these things to be expressed. The lesson to be learned in something like the imprecatory Psalms is not that we should hate our enemies, but it may be some other lesson that God is teaching us, for example, that we need to be honest with God in prayer, that God honors the sincere prayer of the doubter or the person who is angry with God or who is crying out to God from the depths of despair. The lesson that God has to teach us through Scripture is not necessarily what just lies on the surface. It may be deeper. So the middle knowledge perspective is that God knew which persons under which circumstances would freely write what he intended to be his Word to us. It does become God’s Word to us in virtue of that superintendence.

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<sup>30</sup> 25:12

I have here a long quotation from B.B. Warfield that is stunning because Warfield, without knowing the doctrine of the middle knowledge or endorsing it, virtually describes it in this quotation:

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’ of the Scriptures – this ‘bearing’ of the writers of the Scriptures 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. 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. 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>31 32</sup>

On that understanding of inspiration, you see that it is perfectly consistent to believe in a

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<sup>31</sup> 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.

<sup>32</sup> 31:31

verbal, plenary, and confluent inspired Scripture. It allows for the humanity of Scripture to shine through because these are the free products of the human authors. It allows for the trivialities that are part of the historical circumstances of the times at which they wrote. We can understand passages like the imprecatory Psalms as genuine expressions of human emotion and yet at the same time still regard these as God's verbally inspired Word for us, for our profit and instruction and edification.

That is my solution to the problem of how you can have a verbal, plenary, and confluent inspiration.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Without resorting to middle knowledge, do you think it is feasible to say that God inspired the thoughts and ideas in the author's minds, and they wrote from those thoughts and ideas to produce their books? And if a writing wasn't in keeping with the message of God, God could veto it by sending them back to the drawing board to edit their work, or, if their product was unacceptable, then inspire somebody else as an alternative to write something else.

*Answer:* I do not think that that is going to get you a *verbal* inspiration that will say that the whole book of Romans, for example, is verbally inspired by God. It does sound as if it reverts back to this manipulation view of God; God is going to be interrupting and stopping the authors. What if Paul gets through Romans chapter 10 and he goes off course, and God has to intervene and abort the procedure? It just doesn't seem to be a plausible theory. I can appreciate why one might think like this. This would be the natural way we would think – he just inspired their thoughts and let them write it down the way they would themselves, but that won't give you a *verbal* inspiration of Scripture. Without middle knowledge, it is very difficult to see how you can come up with verbal inspiration.

*Question:* [comment how middle knowledge is helpful to understand this concept]

*Answer:* Good, thank you! I found it helpful, too. When I hit upon this, it was as if somebody turned on the light. That's the way middle knowledge is – it is such a fruitful theological concept; it serves to illumine other doctrines, like the doctrine of inspiration, in dramatic ways.

*Question:* Would this all also apply to the eventual recognition by the body corporate and then officially later on in some of the councils?

*Answer:* You are talking about the canon of Scripture. Right, if you believe God has middle knowledge, then you could claim that God knew the church would be guided to recognize just those books that would be the authoritatively inspired Scripture. We'll talk a little bit about the canon later on, but certainly this is just a piece of God's general providence over all of human history, and so you could apply it in other areas, too.<sup>33</sup>

[Q&A: Asks Dr. Craig if the concept of "infallibility" will be covered, and Dr.

<sup>33</sup> 35:16

*Craig says yes/*

*Question:* The small issue I have is, aren't we on a slippery slope if we label anything trivial? Earlier you labeled certain passages "trivial," but isn't it possible it doesn't appear to be important, but it is?

*Answer:* Conceivably! This is not my own terminology. Scripture scholars who have wrestled with the problem of inspiration speak of what they call the *levicula*, which are the sort of light passages like "Trophimus I left ill in Miletus." It seems so tied to its historical circumstances that for subsequent generations it's hard to see if this has a lot of doctrinal or theological weight. Certainly it might be, you are right. Maybe I can amend it to say "apparently trivial." Still, these final greetings in Paul's letters don't carry the same theological weight as, say, the central chapters of the books of Romans do. I think we can all recognize that. It is a relative term is what I'm saying, I guess. It is not saying that they are unimportant.

*Followup:* I consider that particular passage, "Trophimus I left ill in Miletus," important. I think the notion that we frequently hear currently in today's church how God heals and there are certain people that can heal anybody at any time. But yet here we have a very concrete example of Paul, the premiere Christian of his day, leaving someone sick. That is an incredibly important point to make!

*Answer:* Yes, I concede the point. You are right. This is a dagger in the heart of the prosperity, health and wealth Gospel. When Paul says he left Trophimus ill in Miletus, it implies that those health and wealth prosperity Gospel preachers have just got it wrong. So I'll concede the point, and I'll amend it by saying "apparently trivial" or "relatively trivial" compared to the weighty parts of Scripture such as the central chapters of the book of Romans. But you are right; I don't want to be understood to say that these are of no significance. I take that correction.

*Question:* Are we saying all Scripture is first draft? If so, how do we account for some of the books that appear to have additions to them?

*Answer:* I don't think this commits us to saying that these are first draft documents. It is entirely conceivable, for example, that Luke wrote a first draft of his Gospel and then revised it in light of further evidence and testimony. But it is saying that the Scripture that we have today that is verbally inspired is God's Word to us, down to the very words and throughout its entire breadth. But the historical process by which this came about is something that is under the superintendence of God, and it may well be that God knew that if he were to pick a Luke he would revise it in light of hearing this or that story and would adjust it until finally the product that comes to be canonical Scripture is God's Word for us, just as it should be. Again, I don't think that even commits us to saying that that means that there could not have been a different way of saying it or that there couldn't have been a synonym used instead of the word that is here. It doesn't commit us to saying it is picture perfect in that sense. It just is saying that God is pleased to appropriate this human discourse and to let this human discourse be his Word to us, and so he speaks to us through it.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Total Running Time: 40:30 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § II. DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

### Lecture 5

## Translations and Biblical Inerrancy Defined

### Translations

We have been talking about the doctrine of inspiration, and last time I defended a supervision view of inspiration based upon a doctrine of God's middle knowledge. There may be some questions remaining in your mind as a result of that lesson. I want to address them right away.

One question is, "If we say that the Bible is verbally inspired, then does that mean that English translations of the Bible aren't really the Word of God because their words aren't verbally inspired? Is it only the Greek and Hebrew words that are inspired?" I think this is right! It may make us uncomfortable at first. But it does seem that the logical consequence of verbal inspiration is that it is the Greek and Hebrew words that are inspired by God and that English versions of the Bible are just a translation of God's Word but aren't God's Word itself. In that sense, sometimes Christians will point out that Muslims are mistaken when they say, holding up an English translation of the Qur'an, that that is not a Qur'an but instead is only a translation of the Qur'an or it is the meaning of the Qur'an, but it isn't the Qur'an itself because the true Qur'an is written in Arabic. But it seems that as Christians we are committed to saying something very similar – the inspired Word of God is the Greek and Hebrew text, and English translations are just that, namely, translations.

What this means is none of the English translations is inspired; they can be bad translations, in fact. Therefore, it is good for Christians to own a number of translations because different nuances will sometimes be expressed in different translations. Sometimes it is impossible in a single English phrase to capture the nuances in a Greek or Hebrew expression.

Someone asked me what would be the closest to the Greek, and I suppose it would be the New American Standard, in the sense that it is the most literal, word-for-word translation. But that is not to say that it is the best translation. As anyone that has learned a foreign language knows, the best translation captures the sense of the passage and is not a wooden, word-for-word translation. If you want to get a literal translation, New American Standard will get you close to what the Greek is saying. But that is not to say that that is the best translation because it may not have the literary qualities or the correct sense of the passage. Therefore, it is good to have a number of modern translations that you can use to compare with one another.

When we talk about verbal revelation and propositional revelation, what we mean is that God has revealed these Greek and Hebrew sentences to humanity. These contain his teaching to us, what he wants us to know, about how to come to know him, about the world we live in, about his Son, about his plan of salvation, and so forth.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Which translation do you think has the best or closest sense to the original languages?

*Answers:* I do not have a recommendation. I myself use the Revised Standard Version. I think that has the literary beauty of the King James Bible but with better manuscripts and more modern translation. But there are others as well. The ESV and NIV are two others. I think it is good to have a number of modern translations. Basically all of these will be responsible translations. They are done by modern committees of linguists who are experts.<sup>35</sup>

*Followup:* I have heard that the NIV is really too much of a paraphrase and in fact it changes the truth just by leaving out certain pronouns or words that we'd think are unimportant but in the Greek could change the meaning.

*Answer:* That is true about the TNIV – those who are interested in inclusivist language have changed much of that to eliminate male references and pronouns. I think there you do have some definite distortion. But as for the NIV, I don't think it will seriously mislead.

*Question:* What is your opinion on the translations that completely eliminate verses rather than just note the differences in footnotes?

*Answer:* What he is talking about is that the best manuscripts indicate that certain portions that are included in the King James Bible weren't really in the original manuscripts. They were later additions, and therefore they are left out. It does seem to be the case that these verses are spurious and therefore we ought not, as Christians, to take them seriously. But I suppose you could have them indicated as footnotes on the bottom of the page. That's the way my RSV does it. It will have the longer ending of Mark at the bottom and have the shorter ending down at the bottom, but the text itself on the page will end with verse 8. Then it will say, "Other ancient manuscripts read. . .," and it will give you some of these alternative readings. But for the most part, these sorts of verses are not of tremendous importance doctrinally. It would be better for a serious Bible student to be aware of them and have them footnoted, but for devotional purposes, I don't think it is of any significance.

*Question:* More of a comment, in support of the NIV. In the beginning of Amos 8, it looks a little odd in the NASV because it talks about things that don't seem to connect. But in the Hebrew the words for "fruit" and "end" are similar, and it's a pun. The NIV tries to get this pun across when it uses the word "ripe."

*Answer:* That is a nice example of why you should have a variety of translations to compare the verses to see how they would read.

### **Biblical Inerrancy**

Let's turn now to the subject of biblical inerrancy. We've defended the view that Scripture is verbally and plenary inspired. But that doesn't say anything about its truth.

<sup>35</sup> 5:00

After all, you could have false sentences, each of which is composed of words that are inspired by God. Verbal inspiration doesn't mean the sentence is true. Words aren't true or false; sentences are. We haven't talked yet about the authority of the Bible or the inerrancy of it.

## **Biblical Inerrancy Defined**

Inerrancy is basically a function of the authority of Scripture. God speaks to us through Scripture. It is his Word to us. So what the Scripture teaches will be from God, it will be his Word to us, and it therefore reflects his integrity and truthfulness. Biblical inerrancy is a deduction from the fact that this is God's Word to us and that God himself is truthful and faithful and can be trusted.<sup>36</sup>

Having said that, I must admit that biblical inerrancy is very difficult to define. We have the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy that was produced in 1978 that attempts to define it. It says a couple of things about the Scripture that are not easy to understand as to how they fit together. For example, #2 in the short statement says:

Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, 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.

There it speaks of matters upon which Scripture *touches*, that it *affirms*, that it *commands*, that it *requires*, and what it *promises*. Inerrancy is defined in the section titled "Infallibility, Inerrancy, Interpretation" under "Exposition." Notice the second and third paragraphs:

'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. 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.

The difficulty in understanding this is to understand what it means by "all its assertions" (or all that it teaches). Clearly the Scripture is not inerrant in just everything that it *says*. Not everything that it says in the Bible is inerrant. For example, look at Mark 4:31. This is a nice example because I think it is so uncontroversial. Jesus is giving a parable about the Kingdom of God, and he says, "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." Well, the mustard seed is not, in fact, the smallest of all seeds that is sown, and everybody recognizes this. But is this an error in the Bible? It would be wooden and pedantic to say that this is a mistake in the Bible. Why? Because Jesus is not teaching botany here; he is teaching a lesson about the Kingdom of God. Just as the mustard seed grows from a tiny, little seed up into a big bush, so the Kingdom of God will grow from insignificant beginnings into a great Kingdom. It would be quite wrong to say that this represents an error in Scripture.

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<sup>36</sup> 10:17

So it is not everything that Scripture *says* that is inerrant, rather it is what Scripture *means to affirm or assert or teach* which is inerrant. What that means is that we need to discern what the point is that the Bible is teaching or affirming because it may not always be obvious. This will be affected, for example, by the genre of the piece of literature of the Bible that we are reading.<sup>37</sup> The literary genre means the type of literature that it is – is it history or poetry? What sort of literature is it that we are reading? When you read, for example, the book of Revelation with all its symbolism and imagery, it would be quite mistaken to read this as a sort of literal description of nine-headed monsters coming out of the ocean and so forth. In Jewish literature, these figures represent different national realities.

Similarly, when you look at the genre of literature that the Gospels are closest to, New Testament critics have come to the conclusion that the genre that the Gospels most closely represent is ancient biography, similar to things like the “Lives of the Caesars” or the “Lives of Famous Greeks and Romans.” In ancient biography, in contrast to modern biography, typically you don’t give a chronological narrative from the cradle to the grave of the hero. Rather, an ancient biographer will tell anecdotes to illustrate the hero’s personality and qualities and heroic traits and so forth. These may be quite chronologically disordered. If that is the case, how are we to understand, for example, the story of Jesus’ cleansing of the temple? In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the cleansing of the temple takes place during the last week of Jesus’ life – passion week. It is after the triumphal entry that he cleanses the temple. But in the Gospel of John, the cleansing of the temple is placed very early in the ministry of Jesus, not in the last week of his life. Is this an error in the Bible? Or are we forced to harmonize here and say, “Well, he cleansed the temple twice,” which none of the Gospel writers say? None of them says he cleansed it twice; but is that what we are forced to say – he cleansed it once early on in his ministry and then he did exactly the same thing during the last week of his life? When you understand the genre of ancient biography, you realize that the authors are free to tell the events in different order and move them about. That is not an error because the point isn’t to present a chronologically ordered narrative.

Similarly, the Bible will often use paraphrase. They didn’t even have the device of quotation marks in the ancient world! So it will often slide from direct speech into indirect speech, and it is hard to tell where the transition is taking place. The words of Jesus may be given in paraphrase, and so they might differ from Gospel to Gospel. But that doesn’t mean that is an error. They would be accurate paraphrases, but none would need be intended to be a tape recording of what actually happened.

What I am suggesting is that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is something that, once you understand it accurately, should not be taken to be a kind of wooden way of treating the Gospels unsympathetically. You need to treat them as the kind of literature that they originally were. What might look like a mistake, if you were to treat them as police reports, might not be a mistake at all.

Kenneth Kantzer, who was one of my professors and a great champion of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, once said to us that laypeople would be shocked if they knew some of the things that he believed with regard to the Gospel writers’ freedom to move events

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<sup>37</sup> 15:00

about, to paraphrase, and so forth. Even though he was an inerrantist, he did not have this sort of wooden view of the Gospels as being like tape recordings of the life and teachings of Jesus.

We do want to affirm the biblical doctrine of inerrancy, but it is important that we understand it accurately or we may be pushed into the position of defending things and claiming things that the Scripture doesn't claim or doesn't force us to.<sup>38</sup>

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* On the subject of quotations, could you address the words of Jesus from the cross? “You shall be with me today in paradise” and where the comma should be.

*Answer:* That really isn't a question of inerrancy. It is a question of translation. Is Jesus saying, “Today I say to you, you will be with me in paradise.” or is he saying, “I am saying to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”? I think there is no doubt that what Jesus is saying to the thief is, “Today you will be with me in paradise” because that is what Jewish belief was about the afterlife. When you died, the righteous dead went to Abraham's bosom (to paradise). Jesus gave parables like that. The dead would be there until the Judgment Day at the end of the world. It is entirely baseless to say that what Jesus is saying is, “Today I am saying to you, you will be with me in paradise.” That is just outside of the Jewish context.

*Followup:* And the same about the word “all” - “all the people came out?” We know that not all the people in the town came out. But then people ask, when do you interpret the word “all” as literally meaning “all?”

*Answer:* That will depend upon the context and, frankly, common sense. As you quite rightly said, when it says, “All the town went out to greet him,” obviously that doesn't mean every single man, woman, and child came out. It just means there was this great multitude. It is really just common sense. The proper interpretation will be based upon the context that determines how it should be read, and the meaning will be plain in most of these cases.

*Question:* On the issue of figuring out what someone actually said in the Greek, isn't the word *oti* used a lot to mean the following is a verbatim statement?

*Answer:* There is a Greek word *oti* that means “that.” If it says, “he said that. . . ,” you have the word *oti*. Sometimes people have suggested that *oti* functions as quotation marks. But it doesn't always do so. It is very fluid. It is like the English word “that,” as in “John said that. . . ,” where it could be followed by direct quotation or by indirect speech. “John said that he is going to town,” for example. I don't think you can press the use of that little conjunction very hard to say that it indicates direct speech. There are too many examples to the contrary.

Next time we will continue to look at biblical inerrancy and look at some of the

<sup>38</sup> 19:55

difficulties and challenges to this doctrine and then I will give a defense of biblical inerrancy and why we should hold to it.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Total Running Time: 24:00 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § II. DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

### Lecture 6

## A Closer Look at the Chicago Statement

### The Chicago Statement

We are discussing authority and examining biblical inerrancy – what biblical inerrancy means. Let's look more closely at the Chicago Statement. You remember I said last time that biblical inerrancy does not mean that the Bible is inerrant in all that it *says*. Rather we should understand inerrancy in terms of what the Bible *affirms* or what the Bible *teaches* or what the Bible *asserts*. That is where the Bible speaks with authority and inerrantly. Here are the five points of the Short Statement from the Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy from 1978:

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.
2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, 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.
3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by his inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.
4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, 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.
5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

And then here is its brief explanation of Infallibility, Inerrancy, and Interpretation:

Holy Scripture, as the inspired Word of God witnessing authoritatively to Jesus Christ, may properly be called infallible and inerrant. These negative terms have a special value, for they explicitly safeguard crucial positive truths.

*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.

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.

We affirm that canonical Scripture should always be interpreted on the basis that it is infallible and inerrant. However, in determining what the God-taught writer is asserting in each passage, we must pay the most careful attention to its claims and character as a human production. In inspiration, God utilized the culture and conventions of His penman's milieu, a milieu that God controls in His sovereign providence; it is misinterpretation to imagine otherwise.

Remember we talked about a middle knowledge perspective on inspiration and how God would shape the whole cultural milieu and history of a writer like Paul so that he will freely compose the book of Romans.<sup>40</sup> The statement continues:

So history must be treated as history, poetry as poetry, hyperbole and metaphor as hyperbole and metaphor, generalization and approximation as what they are, and so forth. 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.

Remember we talked about the genre of ancient biography and how ancient biographers were free to rearrange chronologically the material in the biographies of the famous people that they described. Similarly, the Gospel writers are free to rearrange chronologically the material they narrate. The statement continues:

We must not regard these things as faults when we find them in Bible writers. 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 you can see that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, when you unfold it, is really a nuanced doctrine. It is not a wooden or inflexible doctrine that just says, "The Bible is true in whatever it says!" It is going to depend on literary conventions of the day in which the author wrote, the type of literature it is, what he is asserting or teaching.

My only reservation I have about this statement is in point 2 of the Short Statement, when it says that the Holy Scripture is infallible in "all matters upon which it touches." That is different than what it says in point 4 when it says that Scripture is without error in "all its teaching." It depends on what you mean by "touches." That sounds broader than "teaches." To my mind, to say "all that it touches" would mean all that it *mentions*. The statement seems to imply that Scripture would be infallible in "all that it touches or mentions." But that seems to be going to far. Let me give a couple of illustrations.

In my debate with Roy Hoover on the resurrection of Jesus, Hoover made a great deal of the fact that the cosmology of the biblical writers is no longer viable today and that this represented an enormous sea change that really disqualified the biblical worldview. What did he have in mind? He said in those days people thought that heaven was literally "up there," that God was "up there" in the clouds, and that hell or Sheol or the underworld

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<sup>40</sup> 4:50

was “down there,” it was under your feet under the Earth, and we lived in between. Today we know that that is not true – if you go off into outer space, you are not going to get to heaven by a spaceship. And if you bore down into the Earth, you are not going to find the people in hell. So Hoover claims that the Bible has this antiquated, “three-decker universe,” as it is called, – hell below, us in the middle, and heaven up above the clouds.

Certainly you can find passages in Scripture that sound like that, but the Bible doesn’t *teach* that – the Bible doesn’t teach a three-decker universe. It doesn’t teach this kind of cosmology, even if that was the cosmological outlook that the biblical authors may have had. They may have thought that heaven was “up there” and hell was “down there,” but that is not part of the teaching of Scripture. Therefore, I would feel uncomfortable in saying that the Bible is inerrant in all that it touches because, in this case, it seems that the writers might well have an antiquated scientific worldview.

Another example is the following: maybe the biblical authors thought that the Sun goes around the Earth. It would not be surprising if they thought the Sun goes around the Earth, rather than the Earth around the Sun. But the Bible doesn’t *teach* a geo-centric cosmology. So you can see the difference between mentioning or touching something versus teaching it.

The only way in which I can understand this expression to be acceptable would be as follows. Notice in point 2 that the Scripture is “infallible” in all matters that it touches. It does not say it is “inerrant” in all matters upon which it touches. What is the difference between infallibility and inerrancy? Look at the paragraphs that explain that. The second paragraph after the subheading says, “*Infallible* signifies the quality of neither misleading nor misled . . . .”<sup>41</sup> I think we can agree that, yes, the Scripture is not misleading in what it says about the three-decker universe or cosmology because it doesn’t teach it, even if that is the outlook that its authors had. It could be infallible in that sense, as not misleading us into some sort of error. But it would be inerrant in all of its assertions.

Let me give one other example that illustrates the point. If you look at the book of Jude, it is striking that it has quotations of stories or verses from non-canonical works. For example, in Jude verse 9 it tells the story about the archangel Michael contending with the devil about the body of Moses. This is not anywhere in the Old Testament. This is from a pseudepigraphal Jewish work called *The Assumption of Moses*. And similarly, in verse 14 it says that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, and then it quotes a passage from *The Apocalypse of Enoch*, which, again, is not part of the Old Testament; it is a pseudepigraphal work. Now if you say that the Scripture is inerrant in all that it mentions, it would seem that you are committed to the historicity of these stories and maybe even to the canonicity of *Enoch* and *The Assumption of Moses*. But if you take the view that the Scripture is inerrant in what it teaches, rather than just in what it touches or mentions, then the fact that the author here quotes from this book of *Enoch* or that he quotes a story from *The Assumption of Moses* doesn’t commit us or teach us that these are genuinely historical incidents or that these works ought to be part of God’s Word.

Let me give an illustration. Suppose I said something like, “He made about as good an

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<sup>41</sup> 10:00

impression upon her as Mr. Darcy made upon Elizabeth Bennet!” Those of you who are *Pride and Prejudice* fans will recognize that as a reference to Jane Austen’s novel – how the arrogant Mr. Darcy really made a bad impression on Elizabeth Bennet when they first met. Or suppose I said to someone, “She was his girl Friday and was essential to his work.” That’s clearly a reference to the story of *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe and to his man Friday, who served him on the island. But in saying those things, am I committing myself to the historicity of Robinson Crusoe and Friday? Or am I committed to the truth of *Pride and Prejudice* as a piece of English history? Obviously not! So I think you can see that it is possible for Scripture to mention things, or to touch upon things, without teaching those things.

What we need to do is discern or determine, as the Chicago Statement quite rightly says, what the Gospel writer is teaching or asserting in each passage because it will be with respect to its affirmations or assertions or teachings that the Scripture is inerrant.

What all this means to say is that the doctrine of inerrancy is not this inflexible, wooden doctrine that you can just sort of superimpose over Scripture. Rather it is a doctrine that is pliable, that is nuanced, that is subtle and sensitive to the type of literature you are reading and to what the author means to affirm. In that sense we ought to be committed to a doctrine of biblical inerrancy, namely, that the Scripture is inerrant and truthful in all that it affirms or teaches.

## DISCUSSION

*Question: (inaudible)*

*Answer:* I am saying that Jude doesn’t commit himself to the historicity of these things. We should not think that because he quotes from *Enoch* that we are thereby committed to thinking that this is really an authentic writing from Enoch, rather than some pseudepigraphal work. Similarly I don’t think we are committed to the truth about the story of the archangel Michael. It may be historical; an apocryphal work can include true incidents, but we are not committed to that in virtue of this text. I would use my illustrations of quoting from *Pride and Prejudice* or *Robinson Crusoe* as an illustration of that.

*Question:* In talking about the differences of the heavens and hell, and what the writers of the time actually thought about it, has that actually been disproved by science? They haven’t reached the outer edges of space and have there ever been expeditions to the core of the Earth?<sup>42</sup>

*Answer:* Theoretically you can say space goes on and on to a certain point, and then there is heaven out there. But that would be enormously unlikely. I don’t think when we say that Jesus ascended into heaven that it means he traveled off into outer space for light years and light years until he finally got there! It is more like a higher dimension. Similarly, the souls of the departed dead aren’t embodied, so how can they be in the center of the Earth, down in the molten core? It would seem that disembodied souls would be in some sort of other dimension of reality. But this word picture that God looks

<sup>42</sup> 15:20

down from heaven is a way of speaking that comes naturally to us. We *still* talk that way, even those of us that don't think that Heaven is sort of "up there!" We still say that God looks down from heaven and hears our prayer. It is just an anthropomorphic way of speaking.

*Question:* Bart Ehrman wondered why God can't preserve and do exactly what he wants to do. It assumes some kind of possession of the writers. Why can't God take care of these manuscripts?

*Answer:* We're talking about Bart Ehrman, who is the head of the Religious Studies Department at the University of North Carolina and the best selling religious author with Oxford University Press. He is an apostate. He is an evangelical graduate of Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College. He is now an atheist or agnostic, and he really is on a vendetta against evangelical believers. Ehrman says what made him lose his faith was that he found what he thought was an error in the Gospel of Mark. The minute he saw that there was an error in the Gospel of Mark, it was as though the floodgates opened and his whole faith just unraveled.

The problem here – and why we want to speak to this – is that not only was this a kind of wooden, inflexible view of inerrancy, but I think he had a flawed theological structure. We can think of our theological beliefs as rather like a web of beliefs. Some of the beliefs in the web are very near to the center, other beliefs are further out, and finally there are beliefs in the web that are out on the perimeter of the web. What could be some examples of these? Your view of whether Christ's coming is pre-tribulation or post-tribulation can be considered way out near the perimeter of the web. If you changed that, it is not going to cause a lot of reverberation through your web. But if you change one of your central beliefs and rip that out, that is going to affect the whole structure of the web, and it might well collapse. A belief like the deity of Christ would be one of those.

The error that too many evangelicals and fundamentalist Christians make is that right at the center of their web of beliefs is biblical inerrancy. As a result, if that doctrine is challenged or goes, the whole system collapses. I think that is utterly perverse. What ought to be at the center of our web of beliefs is Christian essentials – like the existence of God. Truly, if the existence of God goes, your whole web of beliefs is going to collapse! The deity of Christ is pretty near the center, as is the resurrection of Christ. A little further out could be the doctrine of the atonement – how Christ's death atones for our sins. Further out still could be your doctrine of the sacraments – at least, that is my view as a Protestant. Further out still would be your belief in the doctrine of inspiration and its corollary, which is biblical inerrancy. If that is challenged and given up, that is going to cause some reverberations in the web, that's right – but it is not going to cause the whole thing to collapse. You would be quite unjustified to think that just because the Bible is errant that therefore God doesn't exist or that Christ didn't rise from the dead or that the doctrine of the Trinity is false. That would be crazy!

What I am suggesting is that we need to have a sound web of beliefs with the central doctrines at the center and the more secondary beliefs near to the periphery. Inspiration and inerrancy will be one of those beliefs that, however important, is nearer to the periphery than to the center. I think Ehrman's mistake – and the mistake of so many Christians who lose their faith – is that they have inerrancy at the center, and often it is a

very wooden and inflexible understanding. So when this belief of theirs is challenged, their whole Christian faith collapses, which is tragic.<sup>43</sup>

*Question:* I really think you give the atheists and agnostics like Ehrman too much credit. I think the real problem is that they fall into sin, immorality, or whatever it is, and then to save face they pick one small thing which they say ultimately opened the floodgates. I think it is their unwillingness to bend the knee and declare Jesus as Lord.

*Answer:* This is a good point, and some of these folks who have lost their faith will admit this very openly. One of my students in seminary, who is now a very virulent anti-Christian, admits it was his adultery and pornography use that really caused his faith to collapse. But that is not a socially acceptable reason for no longer being a Christian. You look much better if you have intellectual reasons for rejecting the faith. Then you look smart for becoming a non-Christian. So there is a certain motivation to cast your “reverse testimony” in very intellectual terms because then it looks as if you have sort of grown out of Christianity, when in fact it may well have been moral and spiritual factors that were at the root of your apostasy.

*Question:* This reminds me about Gary Habermas’ point about how it is very often emotional doubt that causes people to lose their faith.

*Answer:* I think Gary Habermas is very perceptive on this. Doubt is primarily an emotionally driven issue, rather than an intellectually driven issue. It reminds us that we need to keep our emotions in check and to guard our spiritual formation as well.

*Question:* I am troubled by something. If there are points in the Bible that we can’t be sure about, couldn’t it be said that God is deceiving us? If we aren’t sure we are reading about the God of the universe, how do we defend the Scripture? And I’m not a skeptic – I am a believer trying to understand how do we trust what we read?<sup>44</sup>

*Answer:* I share your discomfort and your unease. But let me be very clear – you said, “in defense of the Scripture.” I hope nobody perceives that what I am saying here is an attack on the Scripture! Rather what I am trying to enunciate is a biblical doctrine of inerrancy and what it really means. The doctrine of inerrancy, as the Chicago Statement says, is very nuanced, and it does leave us in the uncomfortable position that you have got to do some hermeneutics. What is hermeneutics? It is the task of interpreting literature. It means that it is going to be harder than just flipping the pages of Scripture, finding a verse and just reading it and claiming it. That is not adequate hermeneutics! You are going to have to read it in the context of the history of the day in which it was written, and you will need to know and understand the type of literature it is in order to discern what it teaches. It seems that it is just inescapable that we have to do that. That is one reason God has gifted the church with teachers. James talks about those who are gifted to be teachers of the church so as to help give proper instruction in things of this sort. It does make me uncomfortable, it does mean that it is going to be harder than otherwise, but it just seems to be inescapable that this is the situation that we find ourselves in. Notice that this isn’t a question of apologetics. There are vast amounts of historical and archaeological data that show that the Scriptures are reliable historical documents. Rather

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<sup>43</sup> 20:47

<sup>44</sup> 26:05

this is a hermeneutical question that asks, “If the Bible is inerrant in all that it teaches or asserts, what does a particular passage mean to teach and assert?” That is not always obvious.

*Question:* I don’t understand how the doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy can be so far outside on the web when we base everything we believe, the doctrines of Christianity, on Scripture. After all, the Protestant movement broke away from the Catholics because Protestants wanted to focus on Scripture

*Answer:* There are two issues here. One is the issue of truth, and the other is the issue of evidence or knowing. Clearly, the doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation, and the resurrection of Christ, all of those can be true even if Scripture weren’t inerrant. I think everyone would agree with that. There wouldn’t even need to *be* a Scripture, and those doctrines could still be true! The point you are making – and it is a good one – is: how do we *know* that those doctrines are true? Well, we know them on the basis of what the Scripture *teaches*. So although these truths are independent of the truth of Scripture (and that’s what I am illustrating by my web analogy), if the inspiration of Scripture were to be abandoned, then the question would arise, “How do I know that these other things are true?” You would be cast upon the resources of apologetics to know those things, which wouldn’t be a good thing, but they would be available.<sup>45</sup>

Notice that I am not backing away from the doctrine that whatever Scripture teaches is true. I am affirming that; and I am saying that if the Scriptures teach the resurrection of Christ, then, knowing that Scripture is inerrant, we do believe in that. I am affirming that the Scripture is a reliable guide to truth in what it teaches. The only point I’m trying to make is that it is not always obvious what the passages are teaching or asserting, because it may touch on certain things without really teaching those things.

*Question:* Do we need to distinguish between infallibility, inerrancy, and understandability? Peter even says Paul’s writings are difficult to understand! If an apostle regards some of these things as hard to understand, where do we stand? You have to study the word to understand it – you can’t just take the simple reading and assume it is true. It is easy to misunderstand it.

*Answer:* I appreciate what you just said. The verse you refer to is 2 Peter 3:15-16 where Peter says:

Our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

This emphasis is quite right. To say the Scripture is inerrant doesn’t mean it will be easy to understand. It may be that we are deficient in our understanding. Just this morning I was speaking in another class, and one of the men in the group, when we were talking about the need for apologetics, made the point, “When I read the Bible, if there is something in it I don’t understand, I just pray, ‘God show it to me,’ and then the light comes on!” And I thought, *Boy, it is not that easy!* That leads to subjectivism and each person’s reading into the text what it means to him. The text of Scripture has an objective

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<sup>45</sup> 30:05

meaning, and to get it out is going to require some study. We can't forgo the hard work that it takes to understand the text.

*Question:* Is your view of Scripture that it is the ultimate test and final authority of doctrine?

*Answer:* Yes.

*Question:* Most of us have had the experience of believing a Scripture meant a certain thing but to later understand it better and realize our original interpretation and understanding was wrong. Do you know Bart Ehrman's problem in Mark?<sup>46</sup>

*Answer:* I don't remember what it was, so I can't speak to that. But you are quite right, sometimes deeper understanding might lead you to believe an interpretation of the Bible that before you would have thought was wrong. The example that came to my mind was the cleansing of the temple – thinking that maybe Jesus did it twice because in John it is early in his career and in the Synoptics it is later. But if you think that John had the freedom to place the event earlier, then you are not committed to saying that this event happened twice. That would be an example of what you are talking about.

*Question:* I think Bart Ehrman focused on the discrepancy of the name of the high priest that Mark gives during David's reign and what the name is in the Old Testament. But I just want to second what you are saying. I think it is tempting to believe that we should have a dictated Scripture that contains no errors, but we should not give our kids the impression that there are no difficulties and apparent discrepancies in the Scripture. Hermeneutics is always a difficult task.

*Answer:* It is a difficult task, yes.

What we want to affirm with regard to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is what the Chicago Statement says, which is that the Scripture is authoritative and infallible and inerrant in all that it means to assert and to affirm and to teach. It is up to us to determine exactly what those affirmations and assertions are.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup> 35:17

<sup>47</sup> Total Running Time: 39:34 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § II. DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

### Lecture 7

## Difficulties and Defense of Biblical Inerrancy

### Difficulties with Biblical Inerrancy

Remember that we defined “inerrancy” as the claim that the Bible is truthful in all that it affirms or teaches. Let’s consider two types of difficulties with this doctrine of biblical inerrancy.

The first difficulty would be apparent inconsistencies in what the Bible teaches. It seems that in some cases one book of the Bible or one author will teach one thing, and another book or author will teach something inconsistent with the first. An example of this would be the death of Judas. In Matthew 27:5 we read Matthew’s account of the death of Judas: “And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself.” He continues,

But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money.” So they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

So according to Matthew 27, Judas went out and committed suicide by hanging himself. However, if you look at the book of Acts 1:18-19, we have a quite different account:

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.

So you have some similarities here – Judas does die, and there is this “Field of Blood” that is mentioned; but the account is quite different. In Acts it doesn’t say that he hanged himself, but it says that he “fell headlong,” and in the Greek it says he “swelled up,” and he burst open, and he died. So there seems to be some inconsistency here about how Judas met his end. That would be one type of biblical difficulty that inerrancy encounters, that is, inconsistencies.

The second type of difficulty would be just factual mistakes, that is, errors in the Scripture. For example, in Luke 2:1-2 we read about a certain man who was said to be the governor at the time when Jesus was born: “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment when Quirinius was governor of Syria.” The problem is that the historical records that we have say that Quirinius was the governor of Syria around A.D. 6 – about twelve years later or so, not at the time that Mary and Joseph went up to Bethlehem to be enrolled. There seems to be a factual error here on Luke’s part concerning when Quirinius was the governor of Syria.

Those would be the two types of challenges that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy has to

face: inconsistencies and factual mistakes. In light of these, how might we defend a doctrine of biblical inerrancy?

### **Defense of Biblical Inerrancy**

Here is a two part argument for biblical inerrancy that I think gives a good basis for why we should believe in the doctrine of inerrancy in spite of these difficulties. If you are interested in reading more about this, I recommend to you John Wenham's book, *Christ and the Bible*, which is an excellent book on Jesus' attitude toward the Old Testament as the inerrant and infallible Word of God. Wenham's argument is that the reason that we should believe in biblical inerrancy is because this is what Jesus believed about the Hebrew Bible.<sup>48</sup> Jesus believed that the Old Testament was the inerrant Word of God and taught it as such. We should do this as well. As has often been said, we believe in the Bible because we believe in Christ – we do not believe in Christ because we believe in the Bible. It is Christ and his authoritative teaching about the Bible that supplies the foundation for a doctrine of biblical inerrancy. How might the argument go?

The first part would go like this:

1. Whatever God teaches is true. (God is always truthful and cannot lie.)
2. Historical evidences, prophecies, and other evidences show that Jesus is God. (Here you would use your traditional apologetic arguments for the resurrection, fulfilled prophecy, and so forth to show that Jesus is who he claimed to be.)
3. Therefore, whatever Jesus teaches is true.

The second part of the argument takes the conclusion of the first argument and makes it the first premise of the second part.

1. Whatever Jesus teaches is true. (The conclusion from above, based on the divinity of Jesus.)
2. Jesus taught that the Scriptures are the inerrant Word of God (Here you would simply go through what Jesus taught about the Old Testament and show how he regarded the Hebrew Bible. Let's look at one example, John 10:34-36. Here Jesus is disputing with the Jewish people who did not believe in him, and he answers them by quoting the Old Testament:

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 is defending his divinity by quoting a passage from Psalms 82:6, and he identifies this Psalm as the Word of God. And he says "Scripture cannot be broken" or "set aside." So Jesus' attitude toward the Scriptures is that it is the Word of God, and it is unbreakable. Notice that his whole appeal is based on one word that is found in that Psalm, and that word is "gods." Right down to the very

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<sup>48</sup> 5:00

word that is used, Jesus regarded this as the unbreakable Word of God.

### 3. Therefore, the Scriptures are the inerrant word of God.

So whatever Jesus teaches is true, Jesus taught that the Scriptures are the inerrant Word of God, and therefore the Scriptures are, in fact, the inerrant Word of God. On the basis of this argument, we have good grounds for thinking that, indeed, the Scripture is the inerrant Word of God, and we should trust it as such.

This is a deductive, rather than inductive, approach to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. You don't arrive at a doctrine of biblical inerrancy by combing through the Bible, looking for errors, and then, finding none, say, "Oh, it must be inerrant." Nobody would arrive at a doctrine of biblical inerrancy inductively in that way. Rather it is arrived at deductively. It is an inference from Jesus' own attitude and teaching about the Hebrew Scriptures that he used and taught.

## **Approach to Biblical Difficulties**

What, then, should be our approach to these biblical difficulties? There *are* difficulties, and if we believe in inerrancy, how should we approach these difficulties?

First, we should try our best to resolve the difficulty. For example, we should ask about the genre of the piece of writing we are looking at. Remember that the Gospels are closest to the genre of ancient biography and that these ancient biographies didn't mean to give a chronological narrative from cradle to grave of the hero. Rather these authors could group material non-chronologically and rearrange it to illustrate the character qualities of the hero.<sup>49</sup> So if someone claims that there is an error in the Gospels because John narrates the cleansing of the temple early in Jesus' ministry whereas the three Synoptics have it in the last week of his ministry, that is not an error. That is permissible within that genre of writing.

We should also ask, "Is this what the Bible is really teaching?" Is the difficulty concerning something that is the teaching of the Bible? Remember, I gave some examples like the three-decker cosmology of heaven "up there," hell "down there," and we are "in between." Even if you think the Bible writers presupposed that, they don't teach that, and so that would not count as an error. We need to ask, "Is this really something the Bible is teaching?"

Finally, with regard to the inconsistencies, we may be able to harmonize them. Perhaps there is a way of harmonizing the inconsistencies so that they are not really inconsistent. This has come under a lot of derision by biblical scholars because sometimes these harmonizations look very artificial and very unconvincing. But we do need to be cautious because often truth is stranger than fiction, and things may be harmonized in ways we don't suspect. Let me give you an illustration. The Dean of the seminary at which I studied (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) Kenneth Kantzer once told us a true story about his mother's death. He said he received a call from his brother telling him that his mother had been struck by a bus while she was crossing the street in downtown Chicago and that she was being rushed by ambulance to the hospital and that he would get back to Ken on her progress. Sometime later he received a call from the hospital, and they said,

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<sup>49</sup> 11:08

“We are sad to inform you that your mother was instantly killed in an automobile accident.” Ken thought, *How can this be the case? My brother said that she was struck by a bus and was being rushed to the hospital; and yet the hospital said she was instantly killed in an automobile wreck!* The brother was an eyewitness, but the hospital report was official. How can these both be true? Here is what happened. It turned out that his mother was struck by a bus while she was trying to cross the street and was picked up by an ambulance to be rushed to the hospital. On the way to the hospital, the ambulance was involved in an automobile collision, and she was instantly killed in the collision. So both reports were true! As Kantzer said to us, “If I were to propose this sort of fantastic harmonization for a biblical story, I would be laughed out of the room. And yet it really happened!”

So with regard to these inconsistencies, there may well be ways to harmonize them that make it turn out they are not really inconsistent. For example, it could be that Judas did hang himself and that, after rotting on the tree limb, his body swelled up and then fell splat on the ground and his bowels gushed out. It is not impossible that both of those things happened. We don’t know. But it could be a plausible harmonization.<sup>50</sup>

Secondly, when we can’t resolve the difficulty, then we simply hold the truth in tension. We just hold two beliefs without knowing how they are to be reconciled, but with the confidence that if we did have the full amount of information, we could reconcile them. We just don’t have the information, and so we hold the truth in tension. This isn’t blind faith. There is a historical pattern of these kinds of difficulties’ being resolved over time. One of my favorite illustrations concerns the Assyrian King Sargon II. In the Old Testament, Sargon II is mentioned as one of the kings of Assyria that was oppressing Israel. Old Testament historians said that this was an error because there was no record anywhere in Assyrian history that a king named Sargon II ever even existed! – until, that is to say, archaeologists digging in the region of Khorsabad unearthed the palace of none other than Sargon II! Now we have more information about Sargon II than any of the other ancient Assyrian kings. This is just one example of a sort of on-going pattern.

With regard to Quirinius, many suggestions have been made that perhaps, although he wasn’t officially the governor at that time, nevertheless he was acting in charge of the census that was taken. He was in charge of Assyrian affairs, even if he wasn’t the governor. Here is a very interesting note on this from Dr. John McRay who was an archaeological professor at Wheaton College. In a taped interview for Lee Strobel’s book *The Case for Christ*, this is what McRay said:

An eminent archaeologist named Jerry Vardaman has done a great deal of work in this regard. He has 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 Cilicia from 11 BC until after the death of Herod.

That would be exactly the time that Luke says Quirinius was the governor of Syria. This is published in John McRay’s 1991 book *Archaeology and the Old Testament* on page 154. This again illustrates the point that our knowledge of the ancient world is very sketchy, and it would not be at all surprising to see these sorts of factual discrepancies

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<sup>50</sup> 14:55

dissolve upon acquiring further information.

Suppose that our backs are finally to the wall and that, like Bart Ehrman, you think that there is a demonstrated error in the Bible and that, despite your best attempts to resolve it, you find you can't hold the truth in tension and you think that the Bible has erred. What should you give up, then? Should you believe that God no longer exists? That Jesus didn't rise from the dead? That he is not the second person of the Trinity? Well, I don't think so. As I look at the argument above – this two-part argument – , I think probably what you would give up would be the second part's premise (2) – that Jesus taught that the Scriptures are the inerrant word of God. That would probably be the premise that would go. You would say that the passages, such as the one I quoted regarding the Scripture as being the Word of God and being unbreakable, do not quite mean inerrant, that, for example, “unbreakable” isn't synonymous with “inerrant” or something of that sort. That would be the weakest premise of the premises that are in that argument.

I am not suggesting we do give it up; on the contrary, I believe in biblical inerrancy on the basis of this argument. But if my back were to the wall and someone were able to demonstrate an error in the Scripture, I think it would be premise (2) of the second part of the argument that I would give up, rather than any of the other premises, such as “Whatever God teaches is true” or “The historical evidences show that Jesus is God,” and so forth.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Total Running Time: 19:47 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § II. DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

### Lecture 8

## Canonicity

We've been talking about biblical inerrancy, and last time I gave a defense of biblical inerrancy based on the following argument: Whatever God teaches is true; Historical, prophetic, and other evidences show that Jesus is God; Therefore, whatever Jesus teaches is true. And then the second part of the argument begins with that conclusion: Whatever Jesus teaches is true; Jesus taught that the Scriptures are the inerrant and authoritative Word of God; Therefore the Scriptures are the inerrant and authoritative Word of God. Then I gave some suggestions on what our approaches to biblical difficulties ought to be.

### DISCUSSION

*[Q&A: just a question about the archaeologist and author John McRay's name]*

*Question:* Can you clarify the difference between infallibility and inerrancy?

*Answer:* In the Chicago Statement, they differentiate between these two, although they say they are always united. They say *infallibility* has the sense of *being trustworthy*. The promises of Scripture can be relied on. So if we say that somebody is infallible, we mean they always come through; they always deliver. *Inerrancy* has to do with the fact that *whatever it affirms is true*. You might say that those are the same thing: if somebody always speaks the truth, then he is trustworthy! But the idea of being trustworthy would be more of a performance kind of an action – you can rely on it – whereas inerrancy is simply being true rather than false. For example, a telephone book, you could say, is inerrant if it has every number correct. I suppose you can say it is infallible in the sense that you can trust it to reach your party when you dial a number from the book. That would be the subtle nuance.

Where this becomes more significant is among certain evangelicals such as Fuller Theological Seminary, which abandoned in its statement of faith a commitment to inerrancy and instead used infallibility. What their position is is that Scripture may, indeed, have factual errors in it, but it is trustworthy in the areas of theology or faith and morals. What it teaches about religion and ethics is inerrant and is true and reliable; but these folks will be quite happy to say that there are, say, historical or scientific mistakes in the Bible. That represents a nuance that strong inerrantists would be critical of and would regard as backing away from a full-blooded commitment to biblical inerrancy.

*Question:* Does anyone add to the discussion that this is only true when interpreted with the aid of the Holy Spirit?

*Answer:* I don't think that that plays such an important role here because inerrantists would say that the text has objective meaning in and of itself. Certainly we can rely upon

the Holy Spirit to illumine the text and help us grasp it, but it is not as though there is some kind of a deficit in the text itself, whereby it isn't true in and of itself unless it is somehow interpreted according to the Holy Spirit. This is a real objective understanding of truth and reliability.<sup>52</sup>

*Followup:* I was thinking along the lines of how people have personal interpretations and a whole group can have their interpretations.

*Answer:* I would see that as something quite different from inspiration. We haven't talked about the idea of illumination, where you are reading a passage and you understand the meaning of the passage – not as though through the Holy Spirit you are given a *different* understanding or meaning of the passage – rather the Holy Spirit applies it to your heart and illumines it in a certain way so that reading this passage, say, about how God loves a cheerful giver, the Holy Spirit convicts you that you need to be less stingy and less materialistic and give to the Lord's work or something of that sort. It doesn't change the meaning of the passage, but it applies it in a personal way to yourself. That is certainly important.

*Question:* The Fuller Statement denying inerrancy and going with infallibility of the Bible, how do they pick and choose which to believe, which to toss out? That is a slippery slope.

*Answer:* This is a very sound critique, and this is the critique that inerrantists will launch. Especially because inerrantists will say that the Christian religion is bound up with events in history. We don't just believe in a mythology, like say, Krishna. We don't believe in just an ethical code, as in Confucianism. We believe that God has acted in history, and so the historicity of the Gospels would be vital to our faith. Paul says that if Christ is not risen, then your faith is in vain. So inerrantists would criticize this Fuller Statement on that ground. In terms of the slippery slope, that has already begun to happen at Fuller. A number of years ago, one of their faculty members named Paul King Jewett wrote a book in which he said that Paul's teaching on women is patriarchal. He resisted the attempt of Christian feminists to try to reinterpret Paul to make it acceptable to contemporary feminism. He said, no, Paul is patriarchal, and Paul teaches the submission of wives to their husbands, that women should not be elders of the church, and women should not be teachers of men. Paul's teaching is patriarchal, and so, Jewett concludes, Paul was in error. The seminary, in reviewing the Jewett case, decided that his position was not compatible with the seminary's commitment to biblical infallibility because he was speaking about an area of faith and morals, not history or science, in saying Paul erred. The seminary decided that he was in conflict with their statement of faith, but, in light of Professor Jewett's long and faithful service to the seminary, he could continue to teach and stay on the faculty. It is exactly there that you begin to see the kind of rot that leads these schools, in another generation or two, to go liberal. You are raising a very good point, and for that reason we ought to err (if I may use that word!) on the side of caution. We should have a strong doctrine of biblical inerrancy unless and until it has been demonstrated that that is untenable, which we would then need to retract. But it seems to me that we want to start with a firm commitment.

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<sup>52</sup> 4:46

*Question:* As a clarification, when the question comes up from a skeptic or unbeliever, “Why should I trust these series of books as more than just ancient literature?,” you go to Christ first?

*Answer:* I do not discuss this with an unbeliever. I don’t think we need to convince the unbeliever that the Bible is anything more than an antique piece of ancient literature that is historically reliable and which tells us about this person Jesus of Nazareth, who made these radical claims, died on the cross, and rose from the dead. “Now what are you going to do with him?” And then once they say, “Well, I guess he was who he claimed to be, I guess I’m going to own him as my Lord,” now you say, “Well, you know, he taught certain things about the Hebrew Bible and its authority over your life, and now you need to submit to his teaching.” Then you would appeal to, as you say, Christ to lead him into a correct doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy. But until he is ready to make that step, I think it is pointless to talk about biblical inerrancy with an unbeliever. What that would allow the unbeliever to do is to remain an unbeliever on the basis of things like the number of horses in Solomon’s stables or the size of the Molten Sea in front of the temple in the book of Chronicles or something like that. That is crazy! You don’t want to make the unbeliever have to jump through the hoop of biblical inerrancy in order to be a Christian or to think that if there is one of these little errors in the Bible that, therefore, there is no good reason to believe in Christ.<sup>53</sup>

*Question:* Somebody asked about inerrancy, and your answer was that we can know truth without an inerrant Bible. That should be obviously plain, but if you can be more specific – were you just talking about historical or scientific truth, or were you talking about revealed truth?

*Answer:* Let’s recall that back in the beginning that I did differentiate two senses of “reveal.” In one sense, if we speak of the Scripture as God’s revelation, there are a lot of things in Scripture that would be considered revealed but that can be known just through historical study, like the existence of Jesus or that Tiberius was Caesar at that time. These are things that are taught in the Bible but are accessible historically to anybody. In the narrow sense of “reveal,” – which may be what you are thinking of – in the sense in which Thomas Aquinas distinguished between truths of reason and truths of faith – he said you can know the truths of faith only through a sort of divine revelation, that these would be hidden otherwise. We wouldn’t know that God is a Trinity apart from divine revelation, for example. I think that is correct, by and large. We can give some plausible arguments for the Trinity, as did Thomas Aquinas. But we couldn’t prove that these things are true. I am happy to say there are certain things we would not know about God apart from divine revelation. But what I was saying is, I don’t think you need to have divine revelation in order to know that Jesus of Nazareth existed, made these radical claims, proclaimed the advent of the Kingdom of God, performed miracles, and rose from the dead. I think those things are historically demonstrable apart from biblical inerrancy.

*Followup:* Since inspiration precedes canonicity, how do you know which authors are inspired?

*Answer:* That is a difficult question and a good segue into the next section!

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<sup>53</sup> 10:40

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## Canonicity

If inspiration is true, then there is automatically a line drawn in the sand between those books that are divinely inspired by God and those that are not. There are inspired books, and there are books that are not inspired. So the doctrine of inspiration implies an authoritative body of writings with precise literary limits to it. There is a body of writings that are inspired, and this is called the “canon of Scripture.”<sup>54</sup>

“Canon” is a word meaning *rule* or *standard*. When we talk about canonicity, we are talking about those books, those literary limits, of inspired writings to which we give allegiance. This is a question of the canon of Scripture – which books ought to be in the Bible.

## Old Testament

With respect to the Old Testament, Jesus and the apostles accepted the Jewish canon that existed at that time. The Hebrew Bible that was used by Jesus and the apostles is the same Bible that Protestants call the Old Testament today. So Jesus and the apostles used the same Jewish canon of books that Protestants recognize today. The twenty-four books of what is called the Masoretic Text, which is the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, is recognized by rabbinical Judaism as the canon of the Hebrew Bible. This is the same Bible that was used by Jesus.

There is a Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint that was used in Egypt by Hellenized Jews, that is to say, Jews who were Greek-speaking. This is usually abbreviated by the Roman numeral LXX, which is the number 70. In this Greek version of the Old Testament, there are a number of books that are included that are accepted as part of the Old Testament canon by Roman Catholic and also by Greek Orthodox confessions. These are called the “apocryphal books” or the “deuterocanonical books.” These should be clearly differentiated from the New Testament apocryphal books, which we will discuss later, but suffice it to say no Christian denomination recognizes these New Testament apocryphal Gospels as canonical. But these Old Testament apocryphal books are recognized as canonical by Roman Catholic and other Orthodox churches. These include things like *Tobit*, *Judith*, certain additions to the book of *Esther*, certain additions to the book of *Daniel*, the *Wisdom of Solomon*, and *1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Maccabees*, among others. Those are found in the Roman Catholic Old Testament. The Greek Orthodox also accept things like *Psalms 151* and others. Those would be part of the canon for the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches.

The earliest list we have in church history of a list of canonical books of the Old Testament comes from Melito of Sardis in about A.D. 170. He lists all of the Old Testament books that are recognized by Jews and Protestants except *Esther*. He does include the *Wisdom of Solomon*, one of the so-called apocryphal books. That is the earliest list we have among church fathers for the Old Testament.

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<sup>54</sup> 14:55

## New Testament

When it comes to the New Testament, if you read the sub-apostolic fathers, that is, those church fathers that wrote immediately after the apostles, we find them distinguishing very clearly between their own writings and those of the apostles as found in the Bible. They did not regard their own work as inspired, but they did treat the works that we find in the New Testament today as authoritative. For example, Ignatius, a very early church father, spoke of a collection that he called “the Gospels and the apostles.” This would probably be what we would today call the Gospels and the epistles – that is, the four Gospels plus the letters.

From the very beginning, the four Gospels and the book of Acts were never doubted by anyone. It wasn't that the church decreed the authority of these books; rather these books *imposed themselves* upon the early church.<sup>55</sup> It was never doubted that these were the correct record of the life of Jesus and the early church.

In fact, even those that doubted some of the books that are included in the canon today always accepted the four Gospels, the book of Acts, thirteen letters of Paul, 1 John, and 1 Peter. These books were accepted even by those who doubted some of the books in the canon. In the east – that is to say, in the eastern end of the empire, the Greek-speaking part – there were doubts expressed about the book of Revelation, John's Apocalypse. In the west, some church fathers expressed doubts about the book of Hebrews.

In A.D. 175 we have our earliest list of New Testament books in the canon from the so-called “Muratorian Fragment.” Muratori was an Italian scholar who discovered this fragment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and so this is sometimes called the Muratorian Canon. It includes the four Gospels, Acts, thirteen letters of Paul, Jude, and two letters of John, but it doesn't mention Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, or James. Interestingly enough, the Muratorian Canon does accept the *Wisdom of Solomon*. It also accepts the Apocalypse of John, that is, the Book of Revelation, and it accepts the *Apocalypse of Peter*, which is not in the New Testament. This *Apocalypse of Peter* is not the same document as a later Gnostic document that goes by a similar name; this is something different, and the Muratorian Canon includes it. In the year A.D. 200 Caius provides a similar list of accepted books. He lists the same twenty-one books that are found in the Muratorian Canon, so this seems to show that there is a pretty firm conviction in the church about these books by that time.

I think you can see from the lists that I provided that the issue of canonicity was never about the question, “Are there other things outside the Bible that really ought to be in it?” Rather the doubts were, “Are there things that are presently in it that should have been left out?” There were some doubts about Hebrews and Revelation, and so forth. If anything, we have too many books in the canon, not too few! You don't need to worry that there may have been something inspired by God that somehow got left out. Nobody was worried about that. The only concern would have been: Did something get in that wasn't inspired by God?

By the year A.D. 340 Eusebius gives the modern list of New Testament books that is accepted today by all Christian denominations.

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<sup>55</sup> 20:52

The question now arises that the previous questioner raised. How do you decide what is in the canon and what isn't 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.<sup>56</sup> Either they are written by an apostle or they are written by those who were associates of the apostles. For example, Luke wasn't an apostle, but as an author of a Gospel and an associate of the apostles, he comes out of the apostolic circle. Having an origin in the apostolic circle would be a necessary condition. Also, consistency with the other books that are recognized as canonical is required. And then, frankly, we trust in the Holy Spirit to guide the church in recognizing those books of Scripture in which we hear the Word of God to us. This criterion is more subjective, but it is saying that it is through the works of the New Testament that have been assembled that we sense God is speaking to us, and therefore believe that these are the limits of the canon.

One might also add that 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. We see also in Peter's correspondence that he refers to the letters of Paul as Scripture – he says the unlearned and ignorant twist these as they do “the other Scriptures.” So already by the time that the epistles of Peter were written, the letters of Paul were being regarded as Scripture.

So I don't think that we should think of the canon as something that is decided upon by the church, that it is in virtue of the church, which says that these books are canonical. I think it is rather the opposite – these books imposed themselves on the church. The church recognized them as being authoritative and therefore part of the canon. In any case, there was no question that the apocryphal Gospels and other forgeries that were written later should ever have been in the canon. The popularizers like Dan Brown and his *DaVinci Code*, who present the church as some kind of conspiratorial alliance to destroy these other Gospels, is a total fabrication. Right from the very earliest time, the four Gospels and Acts imposed themselves as the authoritative record of the life of Jesus, and everybody recognized that these later documents were forgeries and spurious. The only question was about certain books, in regard to which there were some doubts about whether they should be in the canon.<sup>57</sup>

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Maybe I am naive, but I believe there was somebody named Napoleon, but I never checked it or researched it. I just assumed that the people who said there was such a person told the truth, and there was such a person. I believe the Bible is the Word of God because I believe it. I believe that if God wanted these books to be his Word to us that he could have done that.

*Answer:* In one sense I agree with you. I think God, who inspired the Scripture, also led his church to recognize those writings that are his Word to us, and that they did so. We can trust the Holy Spirit to lead the body of Christ to recognize them in that way.

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<sup>56</sup> 25:04

<sup>57</sup> 28:01

*Question:* The early church fathers accepted the book of *Enoch*, but in A.D. 90 the Sanhedrin at that time got together and condemned all Christian writings, and they condemned the book of *Enoch* because Christians accepted it. Then at the Council of Nicea, the books that were not in the Hebrew Canon (those rejected by the Sanhedrin) were accepted.

*Answer:* I don't buy that. The canon that Protestants accept today for the Old Testament isn't just the rabbinical canon that you speak of. It was the Hebrew Bible used by Jesus, and it didn't have the book of *Enoch* in it. Even though the book of Jude quotes from that, it doesn't mean that that book is canonical. It wasn't part of the Hebrew Bible that Jesus and the apostles used. It later wasn't recognized by the rabbis as canonical, and it wasn't recognized by the church as canonical either. It is not included in any of these old lists that I know of, certainly not in the earliest ones. I think you are favorable toward *Enoch* because it is quoted in Jude, but then that raises this whole question of "just because something is quoted does that mean it is canonical?"<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Total Running Time: 32:42 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)