

## **Chapter III: Scripture**

### **1. Revelation and Scripture**

The term 'special revelation' may be used in more than one sense. It may denote the direct self-communications of God in verbal messages and in miraculous facts. The prophets and the apostles often received messages from God long before they committed them to writing. These are now contained in Scripture, but do not constitute the whole of the Bible. There is much in it that was not revealed in a supernatural way, but is the result of study and of previous reflection. However, the term may also be used to denote the Bible as a whole, that whole complex of redemptive truths and facts, with the proper historical setting, that is found in Scripture and has the divine guarantee of its truth in the fact that it is infallibly inspired by the Holy Spirit. In view of this fact it may be said that the whole Bible, and the Bible only, is for us God's special revelation. It is in the Bible that God's special revelation lives on and brings even now life, light, and holiness.

### **2. Scripture Proof for the Inspiration of Scripture**

The whole Bible is given by inspiration of God, and is as such the infallible rule of faith and practice for all mankind. Since the doctrine of inspiration is often denied, it calls for special consideration.

This doctrine, like every other, is based on Scripture, and is not an invention of man. While it is founded on a great number of passages, only a few of these can be indicated here. The Old Testament writers are repeatedly instructed to write what the Lord commands them, Ex. 17:14; 34:27; Num. 33:2; Isa. 8:1; 30:8; Jer. 25:13; 30:2; Ezek. 24:1; Dan. 12:4; Hab. 2:2. The prophets were conscious of bringing the word of the Lord, and therefore introduced their messages with some such formula as, "Thus saith the Lord," or, "The word of the Lord came unto me," Jer. 36:27, 32; Ezek., chapters 26, 27, 31, 32, 39. Paul speaks of his words as Spirit-taught words, 1 Cor. 2:13, claims that Christ is speaking in him, 2 Cor. 13:3, and describes his message to the Thessalonians as the word of God, 1 Thess. 2:13. The Epistle to the Hebrews often quotes passages of the Old Testament as words of God or of the Holy Spirit, Heb. 1:6; 3:7; 4:3;" 5:6; 7:21. The most

important passage to prove the inspiration of Scripture is 2 Tim. 3:16, which reads as follows in the Authorized Version: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

### 3. The Nature of Inspiration

There are especially two wrong views of inspiration, representing extremes that should be avoided.

a. Mechanical inspiration. It has sometimes been represented as if God literally dictated what the human authors of the Bible had to write, and as if they were purely passive like a pen in the hand of a writer. This means that their minds did not contribute in any way to the contents or form of their writings. But in view of what we find this can hardly be true. They were real authors, who in some cases gathered their materials from sources at their command, 1 Kings 11:41; 14:29; 1 Chron. 29:29; Luke 1:1-4, in other instances recorded their own experiences as, for instance, in many of the psalms, and impressed upon their writings their own particular style. The style of Isaiah differs from that of Jeremiah, and the style of John is not like that of Paul.

b. Dynamic inspiration. Others thought of the process of inspiration as affecting only the writers, and having no direct bearing on their writings. Their mental and spiritual life was strengthened and raised to a higher pitch, so that they saw things more clearly and had a more profound sense of their real spiritual value. This inspiration was not limited to the time when they wrote the books of the Bible, but was a permanent characteristic of the writers and affected their writings only indirectly. It differed only in degree from the spiritual illumination of all believers. This theory certainly does not do justice to the biblical view of inspiration.

c. Organic inspiration. The proper conception of inspiration holds that the Holy Spirit acted on the writers of the Bible in an organic way, in harmony with the laws of their own inner being, using them just as they were, with their character and temperament, their gifts and talents, their education and culture, their vocabulary and style. The Holy Spirit illumined their minds, aided their memory, prompted them to write, repressed the influence of sin on their writings, and guided them in the expression of their

thoughts even to the choice of their words. In no small measure He left free scope to their own activity. They could give the results of their own investigations, write of their own experiences, and put the imprint of their own style and language on their books.

#### **4. The Extent of Inspiration**

There are differences of opinion also respecting the extent of the inspiration of Scripture.

a. Partial inspiration. Under the influence of Rationalism it has become quite common to deny the inspiration of the Bible altogether, or to hold that only parts of it are inspired. Some deny the inspiration of the Old Testament, while admitting that of the New. Others affirm that the moral and religious teachings of Scripture are inspired, but that its historical parts contain several chronological, archaeological, and scientific mistakes. Still others limit the inspiration to the Sermon on the Mount. They who adopt such views have already lost their Bible, for the very differences of opinion are proof positive that no one can determine with any degree of certainty which parts of Scripture are, and which are not inspired. There is still another way in which the inspiration of Scripture is limited, namely, by assuming that the thoughts were inspired, while the choice of the words was left entirely to the wisdom of the human authors. But this proceeds on the very doubtful assumption that the thoughts can be separated from the words, while, as a matter of fact, accurate thought without words is impossible.

b. Plenary inspiration. According to Scripture every part of the Bible is inspired. Jesus and the apostles frequently appeal to the Old Testament books as 'scripture' or 'the Scriptures' to settle a point in controversy. To their minds such an appeal was equivalent to an appeal to God. It should be noted that of the books to which they appeal in this fashion, some are historical. The Epistle to the Hebrews repeatedly cites passages from the Old Testament as words of God or of the Holy Spirit (cf. p. 13). Peter places the letters of Paul on a level with the writings of the Old Testament, 2 Pet. 3:16, and Paul speaks of all Scripture as inspired, 2 Tim. 3:16.

We may safely go a step farther and say that the inspiration of the Bible extends to the very words employed. The Bible is verbally inspired, which is not equivalent to saying that it is mechanically inspired. The doctrine of verbal inspiration is fully warranted by Scripture. In many cases we are explicitly told that the Lord told Moses and Joshua

exactly what to write, Lev. 3 and 4; 6:1, 24; 7:22, 28; Josh. 1:1; 4:1; 6:2, and so on. The prophets speak of Jehovah as putting His words into their mouths, Jer. 1:9, and as directing them to speak His words to the people, Ezek. 3:4, 10, 11. Paul designates his words as Spirit taught words, 1 Cor. 2:13, and both he and Jesus base an argument on a single word, Matt. 22:43-45; John 10:35; Gal. 3:16.

## 5. The Perfections of Scripture

The Reformers developed the doctrine of Scripture as over against the Roman Catholics and some of the Protestant sects. While Rome taught that the Bible owes its authority to the Church, they maintained that it has authority in itself as the inspired Word of God. They also upheld the necessity of Scripture as the divinely appointed means of grace over against the Roman Catholics, who asserted that the Church had no absolute need of it, and some of the Protestant sects, who exalted the "inner light," or the word of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the people of God, at the expense of Scripture. In opposition to Rome they further defended the clearness of the Bible. They did not deny that it contains mysteries too deep for human understanding, but simply contended that the knowledge necessary unto salvation, though not equally clear on every page of the Bible, is yet conveyed in a manner so simple that anyone earnestly seeking salvation can easily gather this knowledge for himself, and need not depend on the interpretation of the Church or the priesthood. Finally, they also defended the sufficiency of Scripture, and thereby denied the need of the tradition of the Roman Catholics and of the inner light of the Anabaptists.

### To memorize. Passages bearing on:

a. The inspiration of Scripture:

1 Cor. 2:13. "Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Spirit teaches; combining spiritual things with spiritual words."

1 Thess. 2:13. "And for this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that, when ye received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God."

2 Tim. 3:16. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

b. The authority of the Bible:

Isa. 8:20. "To the lay and to the testimony! if they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them."

c. The necessity of the Bible:

2 Tim. 3:15. "And that from a babe thou has known the sacred writings, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

d. The clearness of Scripture:

Ps. 19:7b. "The testimony of Jehovah is sure, making wise the simple."

Ps. 119:105. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Also verse 130. "The opening of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple."

e. The Sufficiency of Scripture:

Cf. the passages under c. above.

### **For Further Study:**

a. Do the traditions of men have authority? Matt. 5:21-48; 15:3-6; Mark 7:7; Col. 2:8; Titus 1:14; 2 Pet. 1:18.

b. Did the prophets themselves always fully understand what they wrote? Dan. 8:16; 12:8; Zech. 1:7 — 6:11; 1 Pet. 1:11.

c. Does 2 Tim. 3:16 teach us anything respecting the practical value of the inspiration of Scripture? If so, what?

### Questions for Review:

1. What is the relation between special revelation and Scripture?
2. What different meanings has the term 'special revelation'?
3. Can we say that special revelation and Scripture are identical?
4. What Scripture proof can you give for the inspiration of the Bible?
5. What are the theories of mechanical and dynamical inspiration?
6. How would you describe the doctrine of organic inspiration?
7. What about the theory that the thoughts are inspired but not the words?
8. How would you prove that inspiration extends to every part of Scripture, and even to the very words?
9. How do Rome and the Reformers differ on the authority, the necessity, the clearness, and the sufficiency of Scripture?