
2ND EDITION

THE
PORTABLE
SEMINARY

A MASTER'S LEVEL OVERVIEW IN
ONE VOLUME

DAVID HORTON
GENERAL EDITOR

RYAN HORTON
ASSOCIATE EDITOR



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

© 2006, 2018 by David Horton

Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

ISBN 978-0-7642-1966-2 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7642-1965-8 (cloth)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018930079

Unless otherwise identified, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com.

Scripture quotations identified HCSB are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible®, copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Holman CSB®, and HCSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Scripture quotations identified KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture quotations identified MSG are from THE MESSAGE. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Scripture quotations identified NASB are from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Scripture quotations identified NEB are from *The New English Bible*. Copyright © 1961, 1970, 1989 by The Delegates of Oxford University Press and The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press. Reprinted by permission.

Scripture quotations identified NKJV are from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations identified NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations identified RSV are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1952 [2nd edition, 1971] by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover design by LOOK Design Studio

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

- Acknowledgments 8
Contributors 9
Introduction 15
1. The Doctrine of Scripture 21
Revelation • The Inspiration of Scripture • The Authority of Scripture • The Canon of Scripture
 2. Biblical Languages 45
Hebrew • Aramaic • Greek
 3. Interpreting Scripture 63
Hermeneutics • Exegesis
 4. The Doctrine of God the Father 78
The Biblical Concept of God • The Attributes of God • God's Work: Creation • God's Work: Providence • God's Agents
 5. The Doctrine of God the Son 112
Jesus of Nazareth • New Testament Christology • Atonement
 6. The Doctrine of God the Holy Spirit 133
The Spirit in the Old Testament • The Spirit in the New Testament
 7. The Doctrines of Humanity and Sin 145
What It Means to Be Human • A Biblical View of Sin
 8. The Doctrine of Salvation 160
The Biblical Idea • The Comprehensiveness of Salvation • Salvation in the New Testament

9. **The Doctrine of the Church** 165
The Church: Definition, Marks, Biblical History • The Church: Nature, Ministry, Mission
10. **The Doctrine of Last Things** 175
Topics of Eschatology • The Millennium: Three Views
11. **Background to the Old Testament** 181
Physical, Cultural, Literary Settings • Hebrew Literature
12. **A Survey of the Old Testament** 203
The Pentateuch • The Historical Books • The Poetical Books • The Prophets
13. **Between the Testaments** 238
Introduction to the Intertestamental Period • Introduction to the Apocrypha
14. **Background to the New Testament** 257
Historical Survey • Socioeconomic Aspects of Palestinian Judaism • Jewish Religious Practices and Beliefs • Religious and Socioeconomic Aspects of the Hellenistic World
15. **A Survey of the New Testament** 279
The Gospels and Acts • The Epistles of Paul • The General Epistles • Revelation
16. **Apologetics** 308
Clarifying Truth-Claims • An Introduction to Apologetics • Arguments for the Existence of God • The Problem of Evil • It's All Relative—or Is It?
17. **World Religions** 345
Zen Buddhism • Vedanta Hinduism • Islam • Expressions of Islam • Judaism • African Traditional Religions • The New Age Movement • Atheism • New Religious Movements • How Does Christianity Compare with Other Religions?
18. **The Christian Church: The First 500 Years** 389
Why Study the History of the Christian Church? • The First 500 Years: Introduction and Overview • Christianity in the Roman Empire
19. **The Church in the Middle Ages** 408
The Rise of the Roman Catholic Church • The Rise of the Eastern Orthodox Church • The Crusades • The Medieval Idea of “Christian Empire” • Decline of the Church
20. **Reform and Revival** 436
The Reformation • Puritanism • Great Awakenings
21. **Christianity As a Worldwide Phenomenon, 1750–1950** 460
Church and Revolution in Latin America • Asia • The Pacific Basin • Africa
22. **The Church After 1950** 485
Evangelicalism • The Pentecostal Movement • The Church the Day before Yesterday
23. **Introduction to Missiology** 505
A Biblical Theology of Mission • A History of Missions • Intercultural Communication • Missiology: An Integrative Discipline

- 24. Introduction to Homiletics 551
 - What Is Homiletics? • The Case for Preaching • Toward a Definition of Doctrinal Preaching • Contemporary Models of Preaching
- 25. Christian Leadership 570
 - The Task of Leadership • Self-Leadership • A Theology of Volunteerism
- 26. Christian Ethics 594
 - Doctrine and Ethics • A Biblical Foundation • Christian Social Ethics • Christian Ethics and Poverty
- 27. Christian Education 621
 - Defining Christian Education • Learning Styles • Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Christian Education • Christian Formation

- Glossary 653
- Endnotes 675
- Credits 732
- Index 733

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editors gratefully acknowledge the following people for their valuable contributions to this second edition of *The Portable Seminary*:

Jeff Braun, Andy McGuire, Nancy Renich, and Jennifer Veilleux of Bethany House Publishers, as well as freelancers Jolene Steffer and Rebecca Cooper, for excellent editorial work, as well as encouragement and helpful feedback.

Peter Glöege of LOOK Design Studio for a fine new cover design, and Brian Brunsting of Baker Publishing Group for a skillful interior design.

All those who contributed to the text, whose work will help to inform and inspire a new generation of Christians hungry for a deeper understanding of our shared faith in Jesus Christ.

CONTRIBUTORS

The following scholars, teachers, writers, and practitioners are the “faculty” of *The Portable Seminary*. Portions of the text not attributed to one or more of the named contributors are the work of the editors.

THOMAS A. ASKEW, PHD (Northwestern University), is Stephen Phillips Professor of History Emeritus and former director of the East-West Institute of International Studies at Gordon College. He is coauthor (with Richard Pierard) of *The American Church Experience: A Concise History*.

BENJAMIN M. AUSTIN, PHD (Leiden University), is Affiliate Professor at Providence Christian College, Pasadena, California.

WILLIAM P. BARKER was Director of Continuing Education at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. He authored *Who’s Who in Church History*, among other books.

JAMES BEILBY, PHD (Marquette University), is Professor of Systematic and Philosophical Theology at Bethel University. He is author of *Thinking About Christian Apologetics*.

DONALD G. BLOESCH, PHD (University of Chicago), taught theology at Dubuque Theological Seminary. He authored *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* and the Christian Foundations series.

LILLIAN BRECKENRIDGE, PHD (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary), is Associate Professor of Christian Education at Oral Roberts University, Graduate School of Theology. She and her husband, James Breckenridge, are coauthors of *What Color Is Your God?*

ROBERT G. CLOUSE, PHD (University of Iowa), was Professor of History, Indiana State University, and the author or editor of numerous books, including *The Story of the Church*.

KEVIN M. CRAGG, PHD (University of Michigan), taught ancient and medieval history at Bethel University and coauthored (with Paul R. Spickard) *A Global History of Christians*.

JAMES D. G. DUNN, PHD (Cambridge University), is Emeritus Lighthouse Professor of Divinity at the University of Durham, England.

WALTER A. ELWELL, PHD (University of Edinburgh), is author or editor of numerous books, including the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* and the *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*. He is Emeritus Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Wheaton College.

PAUL D. FEINBERG, THD (Dallas Theological Seminary), coauthored (with his brother, Dr. John Feinberg) *Ethics for a Brave New World*. He was Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

PAUL W. FERRIS JR., PHD (Dropsie College), is Professor of Old Testament at Bethel Seminary. He is the author of *The Genre of Communal Lament in the Bible and the Ancient Near East*.

KENNETH O. GANGEL, PHD (University of Missouri), was Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Christian Education, Dallas Theological Seminary, scholar-in-residence at Toccoa Falls College, and adjunct faculty of Columbia Biblical Seminary and School of Missions. He authored or edited several books, including *The Christian Educators Handbook on Spiritual Formation*.

NORMAN L. GEISLER, PHD (Loyola University), co-founded Veritas Evangelical Seminary and Southern Evangelical Seminary. He is the author or editor of numerous books, including his four-volume *Systematic Theology*.

DAVID W. GILL, PHD (University of Southern California), taught theology and ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Doing Right: Practical Ethical Principles* and other books.

ARTHUR F. GLASSER, DD (Covenant Theological Seminary), was a missionary and missiologist who taught at Fuller Theological Seminary's School of Intercultural Studies.

JULIE GORMAN, DMIN (Fuller Theological Seminary), formerly Professor and Director of the Christian Formation and Discipleship Program at Fuller, is the author of several books, including *Community That Is Christian: A Handbook on Small Groups*.

GENE L. GREEN, PHD (University of Aberdeen), is Professor of New Testament, Wheaton College, and the author of *The Letters to the Thessalonians*.

DANIEL M. GURTNER, PHD (University of St Andrews), is Ernest and Mildred Hogan Professor of New Testament Interpretation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is author of *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*.

EDWARD L. HAYES, PHD (University of Denver), past President Emeritus of Denver Seminary, was coauthor (with Charles Swindoll and Roy Zuck) of *The Church: The Body of Christ in the World of Today*.

- WALTER R. HEARN, PHD (University of Illinois), a biochemist, was the editor for the American Scientific Affiliation Newsletter and adjunct Professor of Science at New College for Advanced Christian Studies, Berkeley, California.
- CARL F. H. HENRY, PHD (Boston University), authored many theological works, including *God, Revelation and Authority*.
- IRVING HEXHAM, PHD (University of Bristol), is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Calgary. Among the books he has authored is *Understanding Cults and New Age Religions* (with Karla Poewe and J.I. Packer).
- ARLIE J. HOOVER, PHD (University of Texas, Austin), was Professor of History, Abilene Christian University.
- LIN JOHNSON, MS (National-Louis University), is adjunct professor at Taylor University, an award-winning freelance writer, and editor of several publications.
- BYRON D. KLAUS, DMIN (Fuller Theological Seminary), previously served as President of Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, where he continues to teach intercultural leadership.
- MARLENE D. LEFEVER, MA (Wheaton College), is Vice-President for Educational Development at David C. Cook. She is a conference speaker, consultant, and guest lecturer in colleges and seminaries, and is the author of *Learning Styles*.
- GORDON R. LEWIS, PHD (Syracuse University), was Senior Professor of Christian Philosophy and Theology at Denver Seminary and authored *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims*.
- HUGH DERMOT McDONALD, PHD, DD (University of London), was formerly Vice-Principal of London Bible College.
- ALISTER E. MCGRATH, DPHIL (Oxford University), is Professor of Science and Religion at Oxford and the author of many books, including *Theology: The Basics*.
- DONALD K. MCKIM, PHD (University of Pittsburgh), Academic and Reference Editor for Westminster John Knox Press, was previously Academic Dean and Professor of Theology at Memphis Theological Seminary.
- JAMES E. MEANS, PHD (University of Denver), is Professor of Pastoral Ministries and Homiletics at Denver Seminary and the author of *Leadership in Christian Ministry*.
- A. BERKELEY MICKELSEN, PHD (University of Chicago), was Professor Emeritus of Biblical Interpretation at Bethel Seminary.
- A. SCOTT MOREAU, DMISS (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), is Associate Academic Dean of Wheaton College Graduate School and Professor of Intercultural Studies. He is the author or editor of several books, including *Introducing World Missions*.
- LEON L. MORRIS, PHD (Cambridge University), was Principal of Ridley College in Melbourne, Australia, and the author of *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* and many other books.

MARK A. NOLL, PHD (Vanderbilt University), former Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame, is the author of *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*, among other books.

FREDERICK A. NORWOOD, PHD (Yale University), former Professor Emeritus of History of Christianity at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, authored *The Development of Modern Christianity Since 1500*.

LIDIJA NOVAKOVIC, PHD (Princeton University), is Associate Professor of New Testament at Baylor University.

THOMAS HENRY LOUIS PARKER, DD (Cambridge University), was Emeritus Reader in Theology at Durham University, England.

JEANINE PAROLINI, PHD (Regent University), is Teaching Partner and Thesis Adviser at Bethel University and Instructor at University of Northwestern–St. Paul. She is also a leadership and organizational consultant and coach.

RICHARD V. PIERARD, PHD (University of Iowa), former Professor of History at Gordon College, is the coauthor (with Thomas Askew) of *The American Church Experience: A Concise History*.

W. GARY PHILLIPS, THD (Grace Theological Seminary), was Distinguished Professor of Biblical Studies at Bryan College before becoming pastor of Signal Mountain Bible Church, Chattanooga, TN. His most recent book is *Judges and Ruth*.

MICHAEL REDDING, MDIV (Grace Theological Seminary), was the author of *Great Themes: Understanding the Bible's Core Doctrines* and *Times and Places: Picturing the Events of the Bible*.

HADDON W. ROBINSON, MDIV (University of Illinois), was the Harold John Ockenga Distinguished Professor of Preaching and Senior Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He authored *Biblical Preaching*, among other books.

ROBERT L. SAUCY, THD (Dallas Theological Seminary), was Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Biola University and the author of *The Church in God's Program*.

MARK SHAW, THD (Westminster Theological Seminary), is a missionary and teaches history and theology at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology. He is the author of *Ten Great Ideas from Church History*.

DONALD K. SMITH, PHD (University of Oregon), former Chair of the Division of Intercultural Studies at Western Seminary, cofounded Daystar University in Nairobi, Kenya.

ROBERT SMITH JR., PHD (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), is Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School, Samford University. He is the author of *Doctrine that Dances: Bringing Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life*.

PAUL R. SPICKARD, PHD (University of California, Berkeley), is Professor of History at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and coauthor (with Kevin M. Cragg) of *A Global History of Christians*.

JAMES J. STAMOOIS, THD (University of Stellenbosch, RSA), former Dean of Trinity College and Graduate School, was Executive Director of World Evangelical Fellowship's Theological Commission.

ROBERT H. STEIN, PHD (Princeton University), served as Senior Professor of New Testament Interpretation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*.

VINSON SYNAN, PHD (University of Georgia), is Dean Emeritus of the School of Divinity, Regent University, and the author of *Voices of Pentecost*.

TITE TIÉNOU, PHD (Fuller Theological Seminary), Dean Emeritus, is Research Professor of Theology of Missions at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

EDWIN WOODRUFF TAIT, PHD (Duke University), is a freelance writer, farmer, and consulting editor for *Christian History* magazine.

JENNIFER WOODRUFF TAIT, PHD (Duke University), is the editor of *Christian History* magazine and the author of *The Poisoned Chalice: Eucharistic Grape Juice and Commonsense Realism in Victorian Methodism*.

GAILYN VAN RHEENEN, DMISS (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), served as a church-planting missionary to East Africa and taught at Abilene Christian University. His books include *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Perspectives* and *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*.

HOWARD F. VOS, THD, PHD (Dallas Theological Seminary/Northwestern University), is Professor Emeritus of History and Archaeology at The Kings College, Briarcliff Manor, New York. He is the author of numerous books, including *The AMG Concise Introduction to the Bible*.

C. PETER WAGNER, PHD (University of Southern California), was Donald A. McGavran Professor of Church Growth at Fuller School of World Mission and wrote *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*, among many other books.

LARRY LEE WALKER, PHD (Dropsie College), served as Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Memphis.

RONALD S. WALLACE, PHD (University of Edinburgh), was Professor of Biblical Theology at Columbia Theological Seminary and author of *The Message of Daniel*.

REGINALD E. O. WHITE, MA (University of Liverpool), former Principal of Baptist Theological College, Glasgow, is author of *Apostle Extraordinary*.

DENNIS E. WILLIAMS, PHD (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary), is former Dean of the School of Christian Education and Leadership and Professor of Christian Education at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

MARVIN R. WILSON, PHD (Brandeis University), is The Harold J. Ockenga Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies, Gordon College.

J. DUDLEY WOODBERRY, PHD (Harvard University), is Dean Emeritus and Senior Professor of Islamic Studies, Fuller School of Intercultural Studies.

STEPHEN I. WRIGHT, PHD (University of Durham), is Director of the College of Preachers at Spurgeons College.

ROBERT W. YARBROUGH, PHD (University of Aberdeen), is Professor of New Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary and coeditor of the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series.

RAVI ZACHARIAS, MDIV (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), is President of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, a speaker respected worldwide, and author of many books, including *Jesus among Other Gods*.

INTRODUCTION

By bringing together an outstanding international “faculty” of evangelical Christian scholars and practitioners, *The Portable Seminary* offers an introduction to a full range of subjects: Theology, Biblical Languages and Interpretation, Background and Survey of both the Old and New Testaments, Christian History, Apologetics and World Religions, Missions, Christian Education, Leadership, Christian Ethics, and Homiletics.

But here there are no hallowed halls, bricks and ivy, or stained-glass windows. The schedule is up to you; study as much or as little, as quickly or as thoroughly as you choose. Focus on a subject or two, or devour the entire book. Location, too, is subject to your circumstances or your preferences; at the beach or on a mountain retreat, on a commuter train or in the quiet of your own study. If you desire to take theological and biblical understanding to the next level, you are readily admitted.

Can one volume replace a seminary education? Absolutely not. There is no way to replace the depth of teaching or the personal interaction one receives in seminary or graduate school. Again, what *The Portable Seminary* offers is an introduction—an overview—to a graduate-level education.

Who will benefit from it? Readers contemplating seminary will gain a taste of what lies ahead. Those in ministry who have had neither time nor opportunity for a formal graduate program will likely deepen their biblical and theological knowledge. Some may discover a great refresher course and a handy reference tool. For laypersons who aspire to ministry—as a full-time calling or as a volunteer—*The Portable Seminary* is designed to

expand knowledge as well as vocabulary, to stimulate thinking, and to provide resources for further study.

As with any learning experience, what you put into the study of these chapters will have a direct bearing on what you take out. The content that follows is not dumbed down for convenience. Some of it may be challenging—Biblical Languages, the Doctrine of God the Father, or Apologetics, for example—though anyone with adult reading skills should be up to the task. The glossary of specialized vocabulary (in the back of the book) is intended to assist in keeping the challenge manageable.

The Christian life calls for more than mere knowledge. We can be highly educated and still lack the faith, the courage, and the humility God desires. But the more we understand about God and about the life to which he calls us, the less likely we are to be tossed about on the seas of popular opinion, dubious doctrine, or self-indulgent living.

So, welcome to *The Portable Seminary*! May what you experience in these pages stimulate your mind, engage your heart, and enrich your soul.

■ Why Study Theology?

[If] you do not listen to Theology that will not mean that you have no ideas about God. It will mean that you have a lot of wrong ones—bad, muddled, out-of-date ideas.¹

C. S. Lewis

Mention the words *theology* or *doctrine* in almost any gathering of Christian believers and you'll get a variety of reactions, some quite negative. Some Christians glibly—almost proudly—confess ignorance of the subject. Few, it seems, want to be seen as “theologians.” Aren't theologians, after all, given to fussing over Bible trivia, engaging in doctrinal hair-splitting, and writing on obscure topics? While these specialists are wasting precious time on things that matter little—if at all, so the thinking goes—the rest of us are busy trying to live out our Christian faith in a sometimes hostile environment.

If you have harbored such thoughts, Bruce Milne's claim that “every Christian is a theologian”² may surprise you. But think about it for a

moment. Theology is the study or science of God. We all know something about God, yet we rarely think of what we know as “theology.”

By virtue of being born again we have all begun to know God and therefore have a certain understanding of his nature and actions. That is, we all have a theology of sorts, whether or not we have ever sat down and pieced it together. So, properly understood, theology is *not* for a few religious egg-heads with a flair for abstract debate—it is everybody’s business. Once we have grasped this, our duty is to become the best theologians we can be to the glory of God as our understanding of God and his ways is clarified and deepened through studying the book he has given for that very purpose, the Bible.³ (See 2 Timothy 3:16.)

As children of God it only makes sense that we should strive to know all we can about our heavenly Father, his ways, and his will for our lives. Taking a casual approach to our beliefs nearly guarantees frustration and misunderstanding in our relationship with God.

Given the choice between “theology” and “practical faith,” most Christians opt for the latter. But is it truly possible to grow in faith without growing in knowledge of God? How are we to know we are acting rightly, making wise choices, living in a manner pleasing to him, without some basis for such knowledge? Alister McGrath asserts that for anyone interested in doing the right thing, “it is necessary to have a set of values concerning human life. Those values are determined by beliefs, and those beliefs are stated as doctrines. Christian doctrine thus provides a fundamental framework for Christian living.”⁴

Where McGrath sees a framework, Philip Yancey speaks of a foundation:

Jesus told a story of two men who built houses that, from the outside, looked alike. The true difference between them came to light when a storm hit. One house did not fall, even though rain poured down, streams rose, and winds beat against it, because its foundation rested on rock. The second house, foolishly built on sand, fell with a great crash. In theology, as well as in construction, foundations matter.⁵

A frequent complaint about theology is that it engenders argument more readily than spiritual progress. Wouldn’t it be better, some reason, if we expended more energy on loving each other and less on proving ourselves

right and others wrong? Promoting one's own "rightness" at the expense of "righteousness" is never to be commended. But to avoid the study of doctrine simply because some handle the subject badly is foolish. The apostle Paul admonished that knowledge can make us arrogant (1 Corinthians 8:1), yet he chastised those who were sinning, having "no knowledge of God" (15:34 NASB). We must find a balance between knowledge and love, between knowledge and faith.

The modern Christian tends to ignore or decry the importance of right doctrine. Tired of endless disputes, Christians today embrace the idea that what really matters is right relationships, not right doctrine. The idea that one is more important than the other is a faulty premise; both right relationships and right doctrine matter.⁶

At the same time,

Correct doctrine in itself is not enough; it is tragically possible to fail to work God's truth out in practical obedience. That is one reason why doctrine often gets a bad press. If correct doctrine does not lead to holy, loving, mature lives, something has gone terribly wrong. But that is no reason for neglecting or discounting it.⁷

The greatest commandment, Jesus said, is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). He did not give categorical options, as if we could love God with heart *or* soul *or* mind; the command requires all of the above. Loving him with our minds will naturally entail finding out as much as possible about him. Just as in any relationship, love compels us to know and understand what he is like, how he works in the world and in us, what he loves, what he desires, what offends him, what delights him. Doing so requires our full attention and our diligent study.

Humility is critical, helping us keep our relationship with God and others in perspective. We will never—in this life, at least—understand God fully; Isaiah reminds us that his ways are higher than ours (55:9). Nevertheless, prayerful study followed by obedient, humble living can lead us to understand him better today than we did yesterday. An attitude of prayer and humility will facilitate attentiveness to what the Spirit is telling us as we

examine the Scriptures and hear God's voice through his human servants. This attitude will also serve to keep us mindful that no person, school of thought, institution, church, or denomination has all the answers.

Neither do this book, its editors, or its many contributors have all the answers; even so, in the pages that follow, we offer you introductory thoughts to start you on your way to a more thorough understanding of biblical doctrine. As you study God's attributes, or read about the atoning work of Jesus Christ, or contemplate the ministry of the Holy Spirit, you will begin to lay the groundwork—the theological foundation—for a life of faith that will please God and make a difference in your corner of the world.

CHAPTER I

THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE



The Word of God can be in the mind without being in the heart; but it cannot be in the heart without first being in the mind.¹

—R. C. Sproul

■ Introduction

In the pages that follow, you will be introduced to three key Christian claims regarding the Scriptures:

1. That God has revealed himself by communicating directly to humankind, and that this communication has been collected and preserved in the Bible. It is not the only means of divine revelation, since God also reveals himself through people, nature, and even through history. But it is a primary means and the most conducive to examination.
2. That the Scriptures are the result of divine inspiration. Not that God wrote the words directly, but that he communicated his message through the agency of human writers. His message to us is inspired, or “God-breathed,” and that inspiration extends to more than merely the themes and ideas it contains.

3. That the Bible carries divine authority. If it is divinely inspired, and is a revelation of God, it is not only reliable, but it has a divine authority over us, an authority not ascribed to any other book.

It would be disingenuous to claim that all Christians believe each of the foregoing statements to the same degree, and in exactly the same way. The following articles will address many of the differences people have over these issues, but among evangelical Christians, revelation, inspiration, and authority are foundational beliefs upon which the theology of Scripture is built.

■ Revelation

Christian theology asserts, on the basis of the scriptural text and the confirming mighty acts of God, that divine revelation is the first, last, and only source for the theological task; that without such a firm base all theological discussion becomes aimless, indeed futile. People have knowledge of God because of God's initiative and activity. God is always the initiator and author of revelation; people are the recipients. God discloses what otherwise would be unknown; he uncovers what would otherwise be hidden (Deuteronomy 29:29; Galatians 1:12; Ephesians 3:3).

General Revelation

God draws back the veil in a twofold manner. There is first of all what has come to be called general revelation. God reveals himself in nature, in history, and in all people as made in his image. The association of God's revelation with nature, by which people have an intuitive knowledge of God's existence, is long-standing and is a truth supported throughout Scripture, Old Testament (Psalm 14:1; 19:1) and New Testament (Acts 14:17; 17:22–29; Romans 1:19–21). That there is a God, that God is the Creator with almighty power, that God deals justly as the supreme Judge, or rules as the “Wholly Other” over his creatures—these things are known and recognized by all people. Thus the fact of God, that God is, is undeniable. When people do deny him, as is the case with the atheist, it is a forced effort against an inner conviction worked by nature itself. Paul could expect concurrence from the Athenians when he asserted that it is in God,

the one and only true God, that all people live and move and have their being (Acts 17:28). Because of the natural knowledge of God (Scholastics, like Thomas Aquinas, termed it *natural theology* to distinguish from that which was revealed by God directly), which confronts humanity on every side in the sum of created things and created laws of nature, Paul can say that people are “very religious” (v. 22). It is not a case of identifying God and nature, but rather of recognizing that the natural knowledge of God is deeply ingrained in humanity’s own nature and in the natural realm.

Natural knowledge of God, however, has its limitations and is inadequate. Because it confronts the individual with the fact of God’s existence, the individual consequently engages in religious practice and asks some of the ultimate questions concerning the source, reason, and end of his or her own existence. But the tragic thing is, as Paul writes (Romans 1:18–2:16), that since the fall, people turn knowledge of God into perverse practices, worshiping not him, but images, creatures, or created things. Thus sinners drift further from God and satisfy themselves with foolish answers for the ultimate questions of existence. Because of a tendency to distort and twist this natural knowledge, some theologians denied that this should be called revelation at all. According to this idea, revelation effects a confrontation with God within the individual. But this explanation was widely disputed on the grounds that if general revelation were denied, people could no longer be held accountable or responsible before God.

Martin Luther recognized the validity of a natural knowledge of God. For Luther, God is not sought behind his creation or merely inferred in an abstract way from the creation, but rather the wonders in the natural realm are among the “veils” or “masks” of God whereby he has made himself known. They are not mere starting points to forming ideas about God, but represent God on the stage where he himself has the principal part or plays the chief role. Distortions of these natural evidences, Luther held, do not negate the validity of God’s revelation. Although fragmentary, incomplete, and often distorted, general or natural revelation is a genuinely valid disclosure by God of his majesty and power in the created realm (Romans 1:18–32).

Special Revelation

To know God from his revelation in nature, however, still leaves him and his gracious purposes completely unknown. The gracious, loving

heart of God intends the salvation of all people. By special revelation, God purposes to share this with humankind in various ways. Humankind would know nothing at all of God's messianic purposes in Christ had God not revealed his heart and purposes throughout Scripture. Before the fall, this communion between the Creator and man was direct and apparently uninterrupted. With the earliest patriarchs, such as Adam, Noah, and others, God's revelation came by means of articulate language used in a supernatural way, thus directly spoken (Genesis 3:14–19; 6:13–21; 7:1–4; 12:1–3). At other times, his revelation came through various means, as the Angel of the Lord appeared at Abram's tent (18:1–15), in the burning bush (Exodus 3:1–22), in the cloud (34:6–7), or the fire and cloud over Mount Sinai for Moses and the people of Israel (v. 19). On the holy mountain, God spoke and made known his mind and heart through his special servant Moses. At times, dreams and visions, either waking or sleeping (e.g., the case of young Samuel—1 Samuel 3:1–14), were used by God with his chosen prophets. Through inner prompting, God moved his prophets, later also the apostles, to speak and write his thoughts and words to humanity. Mighty acts of God on behalf of his people, like the exodus, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the forty years in the wilderness with the accompanying miraculous sustaining of the people there, were carefully and rightly interpreted by God through his prophets. By inner, immediate illumination of their hearts and minds by God, the prophets and apostles spoke his Word as he gave them utterance (Jeremiah 1:4–19; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 1:16–21). The zenith of God's revelation was the coming in flesh of his beloved Son, Jesus Christ (John 1:14–18; Galatians 4:4–5; Hebrews 1–2). Jesus' revelation of the Father and the Father's gracious will toward all people was direct, accurate, and preeminent (John 14).

God did not merely illuminate the hearts and minds of his prophets and apostles to speak his Word, but in specific instances he also inspired them to record in writing the thoughts, words, and promises that he wanted revealed and retained for all time. The sacred collection of writings forms a remarkably harmonious and unified whole by which God reveals his thoughts and purposes toward humanity. For this writing, the prophets and apostles were prompted not only to recount certain historical events and happenings but also what God revealed for special communication. Revelation and inspiration are necessary companions in God's disclosing

of himself and his will, and at some places they simply coalesce into his gracious giving of his Word. They may differ in that while revelation has to do with the divine illumination (given by God in various ways), whereby prophets and apostles knew God and the things of God, inspiration is that divine agency employed by God in the recording of his Word. Thus inspiration's focal point is first of all the written text; revelation's focal point is the information or disclosure God gives of himself and his purposes. By virtue of its inspiration by God, Scripture is rightly known and respected as God's revelation for people today, proclaiming the two great doctrines of law (his will) and gospel (his saving promises in Christ—John 20:21).

MODERN THEOLOGY. According to liberal theology, there is no need for special revelation, since God can be comprehended and apprehended through inner illumination. To some, the Bible was merely a record where we confront the human attempts to repeat and reproduce God's mighty acts by recounting them in human words and thoughts, according to human situations. The Bible, its propositional truths, and its doctrines are rejected as revelation, while the personal encounter of the believer with God is viewed as the only genuine revelation or revelatory happening prompted by God. This also implied that there could be no revelation where it is not received or where people fail to encounter God.

Needless to say, this is a strange bifurcation of God's gracious purposes in his revelation, particularly as recorded in the inspired prophetic and apostolic Word. God took the initiative to make himself, his judgments against sin and unrighteousness, his mercy and grace in Christ, known in this way. This Word remains his sacred revelation, whether received by people or not. But God's loving purpose is that all people shall hear him as he discloses himself in his Word, embrace him in faith and trust, and finally be saved by faith in the Savior.

Modern theologians express such narrow obsession with revelation as pertaining only to an individual's personal encounter with God, and such denigrating of revelatory truths and the Bible itself because they maintain

There is grave inconsistency when liberal theologians speak, on the one hand, of God's mighty acts and, on the other hand, reject God's mighty act in entrusting humankind with his Word.

the presuppositional stance against the Bible as the truly inspired Word of God. The Bible accounts for itself as the product of human authors who wrote under divine inspiration. Modern theology, however, admits only that it is a thoroughly human record of God's mighty acts. There is grave inconsistency when liberal theologians speak, on the one hand, of God's mighty acts and, on the other hand, reject God's mighty act in entrusting humankind with his Word, the Bible. There is no other Christ save the Christ of Scripture, and no other Scripture than that which the Lord Jesus Christ gave and attests. To him all Scripture gives witness (John 5:39; Acts 10:43; 18:28; 1 Corinthians 15:3).

Walter A. Elwell

■ The Inspiration of Scripture

For the early church, two factors were significant in their total acceptance of the Old Testament as divinely inspired. One was the constant assertion throughout its pages that "God spoke" or "God said" this or that. Also, many Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Messiah had been fulfilled in Jesus, and to Christians it seemed clear that such prophecies must have been directly communicated by God himself. The second factor was Jesus' attitude toward Scripture. He declared that the Old Testament "cannot be broken" (John 10:35 KJV; cf. Luke 16:17). Jesus loved the Old Testament and lived out its essential message, demonstrating his acceptance of it as the Word of God. For the early church, his recognition of its inspiration (Matthew 22:43) validated its divine origin and verified its historical accuracy.

Christ's view of the Old Testament became the view expressed in the New Testament, which is saturated with quotations from the Old and allusions to it. Constant use of formulas, such as "the Scripture says," "it is written," "God said," or "the Holy Spirit said" shows that in the New Testament, Scripture is equated with the written Word of God.

But what about the inspiration of the New Testament? The first preachers of the gospel were sure they had received divinely communicated "gospel" (Romans 1:16). The gospel message, given in oral form to the apostles "through the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:2), was later embodied in writing by the action of that Spirit. When the New Testament eventually took its place

alongside the Old Testament as Scripture, it was with awareness of the specific and established meaning of the term: *Scripture* connoted “God’s Word written.”

The two Testaments consequently belong together and are regarded by Christians as constituting a single utterance of God. Inscripturation is the process by which God’s self-disclosure was committed to writing so that the resulting product could be accurately designated the Word of God. God’s revelation is said to be inscripturated in the biblical record. Certain New Testament passages specifically refer to the supernatural inspiration of Scripture, but to Christians, the evidence of that reality is seen throughout the entire Bible.

The Nature of Inspiration

Before the middle of the nineteenth century, the church was unanimous in its view of inspiration: God gave the actual words of Scripture to its human authors so as to perpetuate unerringly his special self-disclosure. In the second century, Justin Martyr called the Bible “the very language of God.” In the fourth century, Gregory of Nyssa said it was “the voice of the Holy Spirit.” In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Protestant reformers echoed those assertions. But in the second half of the nineteenth century, the pervasiveness of evolutionary ideas and the rise of “higher criticism” in biblical studies led certain theologians to question the historic concept of verbal inspiration. Attempts were made to modify the concept or to replace it altogether with a new doctrine of inspiration allowing for a theory of religious development and a patchwork Old Testament. Some theologians shifted the locale of inspiration from the objective word to subjective experience. The experience might be that of a religious genius or of a prophet whose insights and glimpses of truth are preserved in the Bible. It might also be the experience of a person today who, gripped by a biblical word or message, avows the Bible to be an inspiring book.

Such drastically altered views do not satisfy the Bible’s concept of its own inspiration: “For it was not through any human whim that men prophesied of old; men they were, but, impelled by the Holy Spirit, they spoke the words of God” (2 Peter 1:21 NEB). Thus, according to the New Testament, the Old Testament prophets proclaimed a word initiated and controlled by the Holy Spirit. What they spoke was not merely their own thoughts, or divine thoughts

in their own words, but “the words of God,” as they were impelled (Greek, “borne along”) by the Holy Spirit. Although the passage deals specifically with spoken prophecy, the apostle Peter seems to have been using the action of the Spirit in the prophets to emphasize the divine origin of Scripture as a whole (cf. 1 Peter 1:3–25). The same Spirit of God also impelled Paul to write (cf. 2 Peter 3:15–16). For both the spoken and the written Word, the Holy Spirit enlightened the mind and superintended the work.

According to Paul, the very language of Scripture is “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Greek word, as Paul used it, means more than that the Scriptures are an ordinary type of writing, simply “breathed into by God.” Paul also meant more than that the Bible is a book that “breathes out the Spirit,” but rather that Scripture is the product of God’s creative breath and hence is a divine product.

In the Old Testament, Hebrew words for “breath” are frequently translated *Spirit* in English versions (e.g., Genesis 1:2; 6:3; Judges 3:10; 6:34). God’s “breath” is an expression for his Spirit going forth in creative power (Genesis 1:2; 2:7; Job 33:4; Psalm 104:30). That creative power is the source of those special human activities and skills required by God for the fulfillment of his purposes (Exodus 35:30–35; Numbers 24:2ff; Judges 6:34). Throughout the Old Testament, the breath or spirit of God is specifically associated with prophecy (Numbers 24:2ff; Isaiah 48:16; Joel 2:28; Micah 3:8). Such observations provide a background for understanding Paul’s word, “God-breathed.” By “the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth” (Psalm 33:6); likewise, by God’s breath the Scriptures were produced. By sending forth his Spirit (104:30), God performed his creative works at the beginning. “God . . . breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). Similarly, God breathed through man the words that make up the Scriptures, which carry God’s image and which alone are able to instruct for salvation and train in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:15–16).

Also significant throughout the Old Testament is an association of *Spirit* and *word*, the distinction between the two being comparable to that between God’s *breath* and *voice*. The voice is the articulate expression of a thought, whereas the breath is the force through which words are made actual.

In the New Testament, the divine breath, the agent of God’s Word, is the Holy Spirit. The relationship between the Spirit and the Scriptures is thus so close that to assert “the Holy Spirit says” is the same as saying

“Scripture says” (cf. Hebrews 3:7). Paul asserted that what he set forth in writing to the Corinthian church was imparted “in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit.” Paul added that through his Spirit-taught words he was “interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:13 rsv). Theologians generally refer to the process by which the Spirit makes the Scriptures understood (by a reader) as *illumination* rather than *inspiration*.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE BIBLICAL VIEW. Two corollaries follow from accepting the Bible’s own account of its inspiration:

Inspiration Is Plenary. First, the inspiration of the Scriptures can be said to be *plenary*, a word meaning “full; entire; complete.” That is, Scripture is God-breathed in all its parts. To say that inspiration is plenary is to reject an illumination theory in which inspiration is held to be only partial, or a matter of degree. The Spirit’s activity is not limited to a few texts or special passages of Scripture, but belongs to the written Word as a whole. Plenary inspiration also stands in opposition to any “insight theory” that views inspiration as merely a natural activity.

Yet plenary inspiration does not require that every statement in the Bible is necessarily true. The mistaken view of Job’s friends (cf. Job 42:7–9), the falsehoods told by Peter (Mark 14:66–72), and the letters of heathen kings (Ezra 4:7–24), although quoted in the Scriptures, were not Spirit-inspired. Whether they are actually true or false must be discovered by reference to the context. The recording of such words by the writers of Scripture, however, was subject to the Spirit’s inspiration; God wanted them to be part of his revelation.

Inspiration Is Verbal. A second corollary of the Bible’s affirmation is that inspiration applies to the biblical words. God-breathed Scripture consists of God-given words. The Scriptures are “sacred writings.” Inspiration functioned in the inner connection between the thought and the word, influencing them both. That understanding of inspiration historically has been referred to as “verbal.” The term directs attention to the products of the divine outbreathing, the actual words. Because the Spirit was concerned with the words of Scripture, there is no limit to the trust and reliance a believer may place in them.

Yet to say that inspiration is verbal is not the same as declaring that the process was dictational or mechanical. That early church fathers held

such views shows their high regard for the biblical Word, but this hardly serves as a basis for an adequate theory of inspiration. Objectors to the historic doctrine of inspiration often associate verbal inspiration with that mechanical view, however, and consequently reject it out of hand as materialistic. To them, the term *verbal* indicates that the writers of Scripture were like stenographers taking down words they scarcely understood.

When evangelical theologians today speak of verbal inspiration they are not specifying a method; rather, they are emphasizing that the Spirit's activity was concerned with the very words of Scripture. The precise nature of inspiration cannot be given an exact definition. The process should be considered God's secret—a mystery or miracle with no explanation outside of God himself.

The term *verbal* does lend itself to ambiguity, as some conservative scholars readily admit. Most evangelical theologians agree that any statement of inspiration that regards the words of Scripture as “dictated” by the Holy Spirit to machinelike writers should be rejected. Yet they retain the word *verbal* as best able to convey that the Holy Spirit so influenced the writers of Scripture that their words are to be taken in the fullest sense as the Spirit's words (e.g., cf. 1 Kings 22:8–16; Nehemiah 8; Psalm 119; Jeremiah 25:1–13; Romans 1:2; 3:2, 21; 16:26).

The words of Scripture, however, are at the same time fully human words. Scripture can be said to have dual authorship: it is the joint production of God and of individual human beings. Evidence of human authorship is obvious in stylistic features, historical outlook, cultural context, and so forth. From a psychological viewpoint, each biblical book is a distinctive literary creation of its author. From the theological viewpoint, its content is God's creation. Moses, the prophets, Jesus Christ, and the apostles all considered their words to be, in a literal sense, from God himself. The prophets spoke God's words (Jeremiah 1:7; Ezekiel 2:7); Jesus spoke the words of his Father (John 7:16; 12:49–50). The apostles issued commands in Christ's name (2 Thessalonians 3:6) and claimed divine authority for them (1 Corinthians 14:37); their doctrines came from the Holy Spirit (2:9–13).

The doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration thus asserts that in a unique and absolute way the Holy Spirit acted in relationship with the biblical writers so as to render them infallible revealers of God's truth; hence, the Bible may be spoken of as God's infallible Word. In Scripture, as in the person of Jesus Christ, the divine and human elements are regarded

as forming one indissoluble whole, dynamically united. The language is human; the message is divine. The human writers were not passive in the process. They were God's penmen, not merely his pens. The result assures that God is the primary author of Scripture, so that the whole biblical account is rightly designated the Word of God.

CONCLUSION. Inspiration has been defined as that direct influence of God on the writers of the Bible by which, while they did not cease to be themselves, they were so moved, guarded, and guided by the Holy Spirit that their resulting productions constitute the written Word of God. Augustine called the Bible a letter of God Almighty addressed to his creatures. Martin Luther asked, "Where do we find God's Word except in the Scriptures?" The Westminster Catechism affirms that since God is the author of Scripture, "it ought to be received, because it is the Word of God." Evangelical Christians continue to regard the Bible as absolutely trustworthy and wholly reliable because of its divine inspiration.

Hugh Dermot McDonald

■ The Authority of Scripture

Civilization is in a severe "authority crisis" that is not confined solely to the realm of religious faith, nor is it specially or uniquely threatening to Bible believers. Parental authority, marital authority, political authority, academic authority, and ecclesiastical authority are all being deeply questioned. Not only particular authorities—the Scripture, the pope, political rulers, and so on—but the concept of authority itself is vigorously challenged. Today's crisis of biblical authority thus reflects the uncertainties of civilizational consensus: Who has the power and the right to receive and to require submission?

Revolt Against Biblical Authority

The widespread questioning of authority is condoned and promoted in many academic circles. Philosophers with a radically secular outlook have affirmed that God and the supernatural are mythical conceptions, that natural processes and events comprise the only ultimate reality. All existence is said to be temporal and changing, all beliefs and ideals are

declared to be relative to the age and culture in which they appear. Biblical religion, therefore, like all others, is asserted to be merely a cultural phenomenon. The Bible's claim to divine authority is dismissed by such thinkers; transcendent revelation, fixed truths, and unchanging commandments are set aside as pious fiction.

In the name of humanity's supposed "coming of age," radical secularism champions human autonomy and creative individuality. Human beings are lords of their own destiny and inventors of their own ideals and values, it is said. They live in a supposedly purposeless universe that has itself presumably been engendered by a cosmic accident. Therefore, human beings are declared to be wholly free to impose upon nature and history whatever moral criteria they prefer. In such a view, to insist on

The inspired Scriptures, revealing God's transcendent will in objective written form, are the rule of faith and conduct through which Christ exercises his divine authority in the lives of Christians.

divinely given truths and values, on transcendent principles, would be to repress self-fulfillment and retard creative personal development. Hence, the radically secular view goes beyond opposing particular external authorities whose claims are considered arbitrary or immoral; this view is aggressively hostile to all external authority, viewing it as intrinsically restrictive of the autonomous human spirit.

Any reader of the Bible will recognize rejection of divine authority and definitive revelation of what is right and good as an age-old phenomenon. It is not at all peculiar to the contemporary person who is "come of age"; it was found already in Eden. Adam and Eve revolted against the will of God in pursuit of individual preference and supposed self-interest. But then revolt was recognized to be sin, not rationalized as philosophical "gnosis" at the frontiers of evolutionary advance.

If one takes a strictly developmental view, which considers all reality contingent and changing, where is the basis for humanity's decisively creative role in the universe? How could a purposeless cosmos cater to individual self-fulfillment? Only the biblical alternative of the Creator-Redeemer God, who fashioned human beings for moral obedience and a high spiritual destiny, truly preserves the permanent, universal dignity of

the human species. The Bible does so, however, by demanding a call for personal spiritual decision. It sets forth the superiority of humans to the animals, their high dignity (“little less than God”—Psalm 8:5 RSV) because of the divine rational and moral image that all bear by reason of creation. In the context of universal human involvement in Adamic sin, the Bible utters a merciful divine call to redemptive renewal through the mediatorial person and work of Christ. Fallen humanity is invited to experience the Holy Spirit’s renewing work, to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, and to anticipate a final destiny in the eternal presence of the God of justice and justification.

Contemporary rejection of biblical tenets does not rest on any logical demonstration that the case for biblical theism is false; it turns rather on a subjective preference for alternative views of “the good life.”

The Bible is not the only significant reminder that human beings stand daily in responsible relationship to the sovereign God. He reveals his authority in the cosmos, in history, and in inner conscience, a disclosure of the living God that penetrates into the mind of every person (Romans 1:18–20; 2:12–15). Rebellious suppression of that “general divine revelation” does not wholly succeed in suspending a fearsome sense of final divine accountability (1:32).

Yet it is the Bible as “special revelation” that most clearly confronts our spiritually rebellious race with the reality and authority of God. In the Scriptures, the character and will of God, the meaning of human existence, the nature of the spiritual realm, and the purposes of God for humankind in all ages are stated in propositionally intelligible form that all can understand. The Bible publishes in objective form the criteria by which God judges individuals and nations, and the means of moral recovery and restoration to personal fellowship with him.

Regard for the Bible is therefore decisive for the course of human civilization. Intelligible divine revelation, the basis for belief in the sovereign authority of the Creator-Redeemer God over all human life, rests on the reliability of what Scripture says about God and his purposes. Modern naturalism impugns biblical authority and assails the claim that the Bible is the written Word of God, that is, a transcendently given revelation of his mind and will. Attack upon scriptural authority is the storm center both in the controversy over revealed religion and in the modern conflict over civilizational values.

The Bible's View of Itself

The presupposition that God's will is made known in the form of valid truths is central to the authority of the Bible. For evangelical orthodoxy, if God's revelation to chosen prophets and apostles is to be considered meaningful and true, it must be given not merely in isolated concepts capable of diverse meanings, but in sentences or propositions. A proposition—that is, a subject, predicate, and connecting verb (or “copula”)—constitutes the minimal logical unit of intelligible communication. The Old Testament prophetic formula “thus saith the Lord” characteristically introduced propositionally disclosed truth. Jesus Christ employed the distinctive formula “But I say unto you” to introduce logically formed sentences that he represented as the veritable word or doctrine of God.

The Bible is authoritative because it is divinely authorized; in its own terms, “all Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16). According to this passage, the whole Old Testament (or any element of it) is divinely inspired. Extension of the same claim to the New Testament is not expressly stated, though it is more than merely implied. The New Testament contains indications that its content was to be viewed, and was in fact viewed, as no less authoritative than the Old Testament. Paul's writings are catalogued with “other Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:15–16). Under the heading of Scripture, 1 Timothy 5:18 cites Luke 10:7 alongside Deuteronomy 25:4 (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:9). The book of Revelation, moreover, claims divine origin (1:1–3) and employs the term *prophecy* in the Old Testament meaning (22:9–10, 18). The apostles did not distinguish their spoken and written teaching, but expressly declared their inspired proclamation to be the Word of God (1 Corinthians 4:1; 2 Corinthians 5:20; 1 Thessalonians 2:13).

The Inerrancy Question

The doctrine of biblical authority has been subverted by attacks on its historical and scientific reliability and by allegedly tracing its teaching to fallible human sources. On the other hand, the doctrine has sometimes been unnecessarily clouded by extremely conservative apologists who have overstated what biblical authority presupposes and implies. Some conservative scholars have repudiated all historical criticism as inimical to biblical authority and distinguished “true” from “false” Christians on the basis of subscription to biblical inerrancy.

If one accepts plenary divine inspiration of Scripture—that is, God’s superintendence of the whole—the doctrine of biblical authority doubtless implies inerrancy of the content. But the Christian faith can hardly hope to advance its claims through a repudiation of historical criticism. To do so would imply that to support its position it must resort to uncritical views of history. To “higher criticism,” which is so often pursued on arbitrary presuppositions that promote unjustifiable conclusions, the evangelical must reply with sound criticism that proceeds on legitimate assumptions and yields defensible verdicts.

Evangelical Christianity should champion the inerrancy of Scripture as a sound theological commitment, one that is consistent with what the Bible says about itself. But it need not repudiate the Christian integrity of all who do not share that commitment, nor regard them as hopelessly apostate. Still, those who claim to honor the authority of Jesus Christ rather than the authority of Scripture contradict Jesus’ teaching, since Jesus held a high view of Scripture. Moreover, the full explanation of Jesus’ life and work depended on his crucifixion, resurrection, and heavenly ministry, and derived from the Spirit’s inspiration of the apostles. It is illogical to pick and choose from the teaching of Jesus during his earthly ministry only those elements that serve one’s own presuppositions. Rejection of the full trustworthiness of Scripture may finally lead one to ascribe to Jesus a life purpose different from the biblical one: that Christ died and rose bodily to be the ground of divine forgiveness of sinners.

The historic evangelical position is summed up in the words of Frank E. Gaebelien, general editor of *The Expositors’ Bible Commentary*: “The divine inspiration, complete trustworthiness, and full authority of the Bible.” Scripture is authoritative and fully trustworthy because it is divinely inspired. Lutheran theologian Francis Pieper directly connected the authority of the Bible with its inspiration: “The divine authority of Scripture rests solely on its nature, on its theopneusty—that is, its character as ‘God breathed.’” J.I. Packer commented that every compromise of the Bible’s truthfulness must at the same time be regarded as a compromise of its authority: “To assert biblical inerrancy and infallibility is just to confess faith in (1) the *divine origin* of the Bible and (2) the *truthfulness* and *trustworthiness* of God. The value of these terms is that they conserve the principles of biblical authority, for statements that are not absolutely true and reliable could not be absolutely authoritative.” Packer reinforced that argument

by demonstrating that Christ, the apostles, and the early church all agreed that the Old Testament was both absolutely trustworthy and authoritative. Being a fulfillment of the Old Testament, the New Testament is no less authoritative. Christ entrusted his disciples with his own authority in their teaching, so the early church accepted their teaching. As God's revelation, Scripture stands above the limitations of human assertion.

RECENT CHALLENGES. Some scholars have compromised the authority of Scripture through their willingness to grant the infiltration of culturally dependent teaching. Some of Paul's statements about women, or his views about a regathering of Israel in Palestine, are dismissed as reflective of the rabbinic teaching of the time and hence as evidence of Paul's culturally limited perspective. On some points biblical teaching obviously coincides with Jewish tradition. But where Hebrew tradition was elevated to a norm considered superior to or modifying and contravening Scripture, Jesus was critical of that tradition. That Paul may on some points have taught what was also taught by tradition, historically rooted in the Old Testament, proves nothing; on other points he was sharply critical of the rabbinical tradition.

The evangelical view has always been that what the inspired biblical writers teach they teach, not as derived from mere tradition, but as God-breathed; in their proclamation they had the mind of the Spirit to distinguish what was divinely approved and disapproved in current tradition. It is a sounder perspective therefore to speak of elements in which the Jewish tradition reflected prophetic revelation and of elements in which it departed from it. Once the principle of "culture dependency" is introduced into the content of scriptural teaching, it is difficult to establish objective criteria for distinguishing between what is supposedly authoritative and unauthoritative in apostolic doctrine. Paul's views on homosexuality could then be considered as culturally prejudiced as his views of hierarchical authority—or for that matter, of Scripture's authority.

Other scholars have sought to ascribe to Scripture only a "functional" authority as an inner life-transforming stimulant, setting aside its conceptual-propositional authority. The supposed authoritative aspect of Scripture is identified in radically divergent and even contradictory elements—none considered final, all considered equal. Claims for external authority are subordinated into a supposed internal authority that dynamically alters the life of the community of faith. In spite of its profession of nondiscrimination

toward divergent views, such a theory must of course explicitly exclude the traditional evangelical emphasis on the Bible's objective truth. But once the validity of the biblical teaching in whole and part is forfeited, no persuasive reason remains why one's personal life ought to be transformed at all.

The issue of biblical authority can hardly be divorced from interest in the rational validity and historical factuality of the Scriptures. But evangelicals hold that the authority of the Bible is a divine authority; not all truths and historically accurate statements fall into that category. Scripture is authoritative because it is God's Word. The chosen prophets and apostles, some of them called by God in spite of their own indifference or even hostility—for example, the prophet Jeremiah and the apostle Paul—testify that the truth of God became theirs by divine inspiration. Judeo-Christian religion is based on historical revelation and redemption; instead of indifference to the concerns of history, the Bible asserts a distinctive view of linear history alien to that of ancient religions and philosophies.

THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD. The Bible remains the most extensively printed, widely translated, and frequently read book in the world. Its words have been treasured in the hearts of multitudes like none other. All who have received its gifts of wisdom and promises of new life and power were at first strangers to its redemptive message, and many were hostile to its teaching and spiritual demands. In every generation its power to challenge persons of all races and lands has been demonstrated. Those who cherish the Book because it sustains future hope, brings meaning and power to the present, and correlates a misused past with God's forgiving grace would not long experience such inner rewards if Scripture were not known to them as the authoritative, divinely revealed truth. To the evangelical Christian, Scripture is God's Word, given in the objective form of propositional truths through divinely inspired prophets and apostles, and the Holy Spirit is the giver of faith through that Word.

Carl F. H. Henry

■ The Canon of Scripture

After the fourth century AD, the Christian church found itself with sixty-six books that constituted its Scripture, twenty-seven in the New Testament

and thirty-nine in the Old Testament. Just as Plato, Aristotle, and Homer form a canon of Greek literature, so the New Testament books became the canon of Christian literature. The criteria for selecting the books in the Jewish canon (the Old Testament) are not known, but clearly had to do with their worth in the ongoing life and religion of the worshiping nation. The criteria of the selection of New Testament books revolved around their “apostolicity,” according to early church writers. Like those of the Old Testament, these books were collected and preserved by local churches in the continuing process of their worship and need for authoritative guidance for Christian living. The formation of the canon was a process rather than an event, which took several hundred years to reach finality in all parts of the Roman Empire. Local canons were the basis for comparison, and out of them eventually emerged the general canon that exists in Christendom today, although some of the Eastern churches have a New Testament slightly smaller than that accepted in the West. Judaism, as well as Christianity as a whole, believes that the Spirit of God was operative in some providential way in the production and preservation of his Word.

Old Testament Canon

The *Old Testament* is a name that does not appear in Jewish literature. Jews prefer to call their thirty-nine books of Scripture the Tanak—an acronym formed from the first letters of Torah (Law), Naviim (Prophets), and Kethubim (Writings). These are called the “Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms” (the first book of the Writings in the Hebrew Bible) in Luke 24:44. Christians called their writings the New Testament, or covenant, the latter term being a designation earlier used of the agreement God made with Abraham and the patriarchs that was repeated by Christ to his apostles (Matthew 26:28). First-century Christians considered their new covenant (1 Corinthians 11:25) from Christ to be a continuation of the one made earlier with the patriarchs (Ephesians 2:12), spoken of by the prophets (Jeremiah 31:31–34), and which was therefore called a former covenant (Hebrews 8:7–13; 9:1, 15–22), or in later centuries the Old Testament.

The terms *Old* and *New* do not appear in the writings of the apostolic fathers of the first and second century or in the apologists of the early to

mid-second century, but they do appear in the latter half of the second century in the writings of Justin Martyr (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 11:2), Irenaeus (*Adversus Haereses* [*Against the Heresies*], 4.9.1), Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* [*Miscellanies*], 1:5), and in the early third century in Origen (*De Principiis* [*On First Principles*], 4.1.1). In these works the expression referred more to the covenant itself than to the books containing it, though the transfer was eventually made.

The term *canon* was not used in either Testament to refer to the Jewish Scriptures. The idea of limitation inherent in the Word was not appropriate to the nature of religious authority in Jewish religion during the thousand years when the Old Testament books were being written. Only the Torah was conceived as incapable of being added to or taken from (Deuteronomy 4:2). Jewish religion existed for a millennium, from Moses to Malachi, without a closed canon (i.e., an exclusive list of authoritative books). Never in their history did the people of the Old Testament have the entire thirty-nine books of the Old

Testament. When their canon was closed is not known. Although some questions were being asked about religious authority by rabbis at Jamnia twenty years after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, we have our first list of thirty-nine books produced by Melito of Sardis around 170. That list includes no books written after the time of Malachi, unless one is disposed to date Daniel to the second century BC.

The Prophets and the Writings were always considered secondary to the Law. Their composition and collection was a process rather than an event in the life of the people of Israel and functioned largely as a record of the nation's response to the Law, which was so sacred that it was kept (according to rabbinical tradition: Babylonian Talmud, Baba Bathra 14a; cf. also Cairo Damascus Document 5.2) in the ark of the covenant, which stood in the holy of holies in the tabernacle. In Deuteronomy 31:26, however, the Levites were commanded by Moses merely to put the book of the Law beside the ark. Nevertheless, its very presence in the holy of holies establishes its uniqueness in relation to other Old Testament books.

The "canon"
generally refers to
those books in the
Jewish and Christian
Bible considered
to be Scripture and
therefore authoritative
in matters of faith
and doctrine.

The thirty-nine books of our Old Testament were originally divided into only twenty-four, according to the uniform testimony of early Hebrew tradition. This arrangement included five books of the Law, eight Prophets, and eleven Writings. Modern Hebrew Bibles reflect this tripartite arrangement used in the first three printed editions (late fifteenth century). The Law contained the Pentateuch in our familiar order, Genesis to Deuteronomy. The nine Prophets were Joshua, Judges, Samuel (1, 2), Kings (1, 2), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel; and the Minor Prophets (twelve) were considered as one book and arranged in the same order as in English Bibles. The eleven books of Writings contained three of poetry (Psalms, Proverbs, Job), five of rolls (Song, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther), which were read at the important feasts and arranged in the chronological order of their observance, and three of narrative or historical (Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, 1–2 Chronicles).

Apart from authentic Jewish tradition, efforts were made to divide the books into twenty-one, combining Ruth with Judges and Lamentations with Jeremiah. All such efforts, however, are of Greek origin and have no support in Hebrew tradition.

The oldest extant manuscripts of the Old Testament in Hebrew are the Masoretic texts, which are no earlier than the eighth century AD. Only manuscripts of individual books have been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Masoretic scribes apparently laid down no rules about arrangement of books because there is no uniform order of the Latter Prophets or the Writings in early Hebrew manuscripts. Nor is the situation any different in ancient Greek translations of the Hebrew. Modern Protestant Bibles follow the order of the Latin Vulgate and the content of the Hebrew. Both the Vulgate and the Septuagint (Greek translation) contained the Apocrypha, which was never accepted by the Jews. The Roman Catholic Church includes the Apocrypha in its English translations because of the influence of the Vulgate on Catholic tradition. It is considered deuterocanonical.

Even though no uniformity of order was maintained, the Alexandrian order, reflected in the Greek manuscripts, generally arranged books according to their subject matter—narrative, history, poetry, and prophecy, with the apocryphal books appropriately interspersed into these categories. The Hebrew division was totally ignored.

Early Hebrew Bibles divided the text into small paragraphs and larger sections somewhat akin to our paragraphs. These were indicated by spaces

left between them—three letters between the small sections and nine letters between the larger ones. The number of sections is not the same in all manuscripts. Jesus probably referred to such sections in his comment concerning the “passage about the burning bush” (Mark 12:26 NASB). Later, liturgical needs led to further divisions of the text for the complete reading of the Law in Babylonian synagogues in one year (fifty-four sections) and in Palestinian synagogues in three years (154 sections).

New Testament Canon

The formation of the New Testament canon is no less enigmatic than that of the Old Testament, also being a process rather than an event. Authority was inherent in the commission to the apostles (Matthew 28:18) but was not accepted without question by all (1 Corinthians 9:1–3). Not all the books written by apostles and those closely associated with them were eventually included in the canon. Paul’s former letter to the Corinthians (cf. 5:9) and his letter to the church of Laodicea (cf. Colossians 4:16) have never been identified, although some argue that the Corinthian letter is redacted into the canonical epistles, and Marcion² thought Laodiceans were actually Ephesians. Polycarp, writing to the Philippians in the mid-second century, mentions a plurality of letters written by Paul to Philippi (see Polycarp’s *Letter to the Philippians*, 3:2). Of course, devout believers accepted any teaching by an apostle, whether oral or written, as authoritative. By the late second century, Irenaeus considered apostolicity to be the fundamental criterion of genuineness.

Just when the idea of gathering together all the important and authoritative works of these early writers was conceived is not known. Second Peter (3:16) speaks of several letters known to be by Paul. Polycarp, again writing to the church in Philippi (mid-second century), sends at their request all the letters of Ignatius in his possession (Polycarp 13:2). The death of Ignatius about forty years earlier had not resulted in the destruction or loss of his letters by the various churches.

[Edgar] Goodspeed’s hypothesis that the Pauline Letters had “fallen into obscurity as most old letters do,” and were collected only after the publication of Acts prompted it, creates more problems than it solves. Letters were expensive to produce (on parchment or papyrus), and letters from apostles were rare blessings in a time when no New Testament

existed and churches functioned largely through local charismatic leadership (1 Corinthians 14). The Colossian church was instructed to read the letter Paul wrote to Laodicea and vice versa (Colossians 4:16). Clearly such letters were deemed valuable and authoritative. They would not “fall into obscurity” by neglect. The failure of the Gospels or Acts to cite any of Paul’s letters has no bearing on the question of when they may have been collected. Individual letters, if known, could have been cited had they been considered germane to the work being composed. Clement of Rome, for example, clearly referred to 1 Corinthians about AD 90 when he wrote: “Take up the epistle of the blessed Paul the Apostle. What did he first write to you at the beginning of his preaching? With true inspiration he charged you” (1 Clement 47:1–3). Clement then refers to matters in 1 Corinthians 1.

By the late second century, collections of early Christian documents would certainly have been well underway. Marcion was already making a limited collection of Paul and Luke (accepting only ten of Paul’s works). Gnostics were amassing a huge library of apocryphal Christian documents (discovered in 1945 in Upper Egypt and published as *The Nag Hammadi Library* by James Robinson). Both Irenaeus and Tertullian show extensive knowledge of a wide assortment of New Testament books. If the Muratorian Canon is to be dated in the second century rather than the fourth, it provides clear evidence at this time of a canonical list (in Rome?) that contains many New Testament books, but also “several others which cannot be received into the Universal Church.” A difference is further made between documents among the apostolic books that can be read in public services and those that cannot.

A papyrus manuscript commonly dated to about AD 200 and containing some of Paul’s letters was found in 1931 in Egypt and subsequently purchased by Chester Beatty. Although it is not an ecclesiastical list of approved books, it is evidence of a collection in the end of the second and beginning of the third century. The manuscript is fragmentary but contains portions of Romans, Hebrews, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1 Thessalonians, in that order. Another manuscript, among the twelve that were found, contains the Gospels (in the familiar order) and Acts. It dates to the first half of the third century. (No lists of authoritative books have yet been found in the third century of which I am aware.)

Eusebius of Caesarea (*Ecclesiastica Historia* [*Church History*], 6.25) mentions several third-century writings of Origen containing discussions of books that he calls (for the first time among early authors, I believe) “canonical.” However, Origen gives us no authoritative list of such books.

The fourth century, on the other hand, contains several. Eusebius differentiates several categories of books. These are (1) accepted, (2) disputed, (3) rejected, and (4) heretical. The accepted books contain most of our present New Testament books. The disputed group contains James, Jude, 2 Peter, and 2 and 3 John. The only New Testament book listed in the rejected group is Revelation, but with a note that many put it in group one, where Eusebius himself had already placed it. The fourth group consists primarily of pseudepigraphical books (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastica Historia*, 3.25).

Two of our oldest and best manuscripts of the Bible in Greek come from the fourth century, Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus. The former contains all of the New Testament from Matthew to Hebrews, where it breaks off in chapter 9 with missing leaves. The order is: the four Gospels (in the familiar order), Acts, General Epistles, and Pauline Epistles. The latter contains the Gospels (in the familiar order), the Paulines, with Hebrews after 2 Thessalonians, followed by 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, then Acts followed by the General Epistles, Revelation, and the Books of Barnabas and Hermas. The last two indicate a broader local canon than might be found in some communities. Codex Alexandrinus in the fifth century also includes 1 and 2 Clement. These manuscripts seem to represent the locality of Egypt.

The first actual list of canonical books that contains our twenty-seven, exclusively, dates to AD 367, appearing in Athanasius of Alexandria’s festal letter (#96). The order, however, is different. The Gospels are followed by Acts and then the General Epistles. Next are the Pauline Letters with Hebrews after 2 Thessalonians, followed by 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Revelation. In 380, we find our twenty-seven books in the familiar arrangement (taken from the Latin Vulgate) listed in the writings of Amphilocius of Iconium.

This means that no list containing just our twenty-seven books in their familiar order appeared until the end of the fourth century, which seems to be when the process of canon formation was reaching its conclusion in the West.

There is no “correct” order of books in the New Testament. The order we have is simply taken over from the Latin Vulgate, the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church, from which the earliest translations were made. The oldest Greek manuscripts have varying arrangements.

Our modern chapter divisions were introduced by Stephen Langdon for the Latin Vulgate New Testament as well as the Old Testament at the beginning of the thirteenth century (c. 1228). Modern verse division is the work of Robert Stephanus, who published a Latin edition of the New Testament in 1551 in Geneva with the text of the chapters divided into verses.

Walter A. Elwell

For Further Reading and Study

F. F. Bruce, *Canon of Scripture*

David Ewert, *A General Introduction to the Bible*

Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (4 vols.)

Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible*

Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*

H. D. McDonald, *What the Bible Teaches About the Bible*

J.I. Packer, *God Has Spoken*

Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey From Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible*

See also end of chapter 10.