

APPROACHING THE TEXT

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*“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction,
and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete,
equipped for every good work.”*

(2 Timothy 3:16, 17)

The Bible is unique among all other books. There is nothing that approaches its rich, unflinching history nor its authoritative directives for human life. Other books are religious in nature and some of them claim divine authorship but they all fall short of the Bible.

Inspiration

The inimitable nature of the Bible arises from its source. The Bible claims to be from Jehovah God and as such does not simply contain truth. It is truth (John 17:17). The Scriptures assert their inspiration from God (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). In the King James Version this verse begins, *“All Scripture is inspired...”* The word inspired is probably better translated *“breathed out”* as it is in the English Standard Version.¹

¹ We will usually use the English Standard Version in this article although references may be made to other translations as well.

The original Greek word, translated “inspired” or “breathed out” is θεόπνευστος, pronounced theo-NOOSE-tos, which is a compound word that literally means God breathed. As we speak, we breathe. Likewise, the words of Scripture are the words of God that are breathed out for us. In some miraculous way, God used the unique vocabularies of the Bible writers to deliver his message. But at no time did God ever relinquish control of his message to mortals. It is always his thoughts and his message. It was the Holy Spirit of God that moved godly men to pen the words of the Bible (2 Peter 1:21). Therefore, we have God’s message of truth which is then given to the world through the process of inspiration.

We may conclude that biblical inspiration is best defined as:

“The transmission of truth from God to man, through man, for man.”²

We should emphasize that the biblical use of the word inspiration is vastly different from the way we use the word today. A person may say that a sunset is inspiring. An orator may be said to deliver an inspiring message. However this modern use of the word is not the same as the Biblical meaning. Biblical inspiration sets the Bible apart from all other writings. No other book is inspired.

The Bible claims God is true (2 Samuel 7:28; 22:31; Psalm 18:30; Proverbs 30:5; Romans 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 John 5:20; Revelation 19:9).³ Therefore, mankind can know real truth (John 8:32) through the Bible which comes by the inspiration of God. Only truth can free man from his certain destination of condemnation. Only truth can guide a man toward and unto salvation (John 8:32) and save him eternally. Thus we see not only the unique nature of the Scriptures but their unique power to save men (Romans 1:16).

² Students should commit this definition to memory.

³ A skeptic could charge that we are using circular reasoning to argue for the truthfulness of God. However we assert that the actual proof of truthfulness is not the Bible but numerous secular, historic evidences to the many miracles reported in Scripture. Although it is beyond the boundaries of this study, we argue that miracles confirm the truth being spoken. Whether it is Jehovah speaking or inspired men, unexplainable miracles confirm the truth of their words.

Authorship

While God, through the Holy Spirit, is the ultimate, single author of Scripture, as many as 40 people were actually used to write the words of the Bible. This multiple-author nature of the Bible is important. When faced with providing truth to his creation, God chose between three methods. He could deliver all truth through a single individual who would then ensure that it was taken to the world. This is the method utilized by Islam, the Mormon Church, and in later days, by the Roman Catholic Church.⁴ But such is problematic. All truth is then dependent upon one, unconfirmed prophet. Even if that prophet is true, there always remains a suspicion of error or even deliberate deception.

A second method is to communicate truth individually to every person as the need arises. This could be done via visions or dreams. Some individuals today assert such direct, personal revelation. It is a common claim of many preachers within the Pentecostal and charismatic movements.⁵ John McArthur recently said it this way:

Preoccupied with mystical encounters and emotional ecstasies, charismatics seek ongoing revelation from heaven – meaning that, for them, the Bible alone is simply not enough. Within a charismatic paradigm, biblical revelation must be supplemented with personal ‘words from God,’ supposed impressions from the Holy Spirit and other subjective religious experiences.⁶

The problem with such alleged revelations is that they are often contradictory to other similar revelations and, more importantly, they often contradict the Scriptures themselves. Further complicating such supposed divine disclosures is the total lack of any verification. Those who claim to

⁴ Mohammed is the sole source for the Koran which he claims to have received from the angel Gabriel. The book of Mormon is from the writings of Joseph Smith which he asserts were given to him through the work of an angel named Moroni. Catholicism continues to receive what they believe to be infallible revelations through the Pope.

⁵ Sometimes a preacher will be heard to say that God “laid a message on my heart.” Some will be so bold as to say that God actually gave them a prophecy to share. Such claims are not restricted to charismatics but is being heard more and more among so-called conservative, Bible-honoring preachers.

⁶ John McArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit With Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2013), 218.

have a new message from God never produce the kind of biblical miracles that confirmed the words of Scriptures.

The third method of moving truth to the world is through a multiplicity of authors each of whom is verified in his writings by miracles. It is this method that God used for the Bible.

Verification

It is critical to know that a message is actually from God. When reading of Jesus and his miracles we must judge the truthfulness of the story. Can we know that Jesus healed a blind man? Can we know that Jesus made the crippled man walk? Are we sure he raised a man from the dead? Did Jesus really rise from the dead? These events are confirmed by the people who witnessed them. The popularity of Jesus, the staggering growth of the church and the inability of opponents to silence the apostles all point to reality of those miracles.

But the miracles served a more important purpose than healing or resurrection. Miracles confirmed the words spoken by the miracle workers. They were God's sign to the world that his message was being truthfully delivered.

Consider the statement of skeptical Nicodemus in John 3:2, *"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."* This ruler was precisely on point. Jesus' miracles confirmed that he was approved of by God. Likewise, Peter argued that the resurrection of Jesus confirmed that he was approved of by God himself. While preaching to Jews in the very same city of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, and preaching to the very people who witnessed his death and resurrection and speaking within days of Jesus' presence in that city, Peter declared, *"This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. (Acts 2:32, 33).*

When Jesus healed a man possessed of a demon and who was blind and mute, the people were “amazed” at what he had done (Matthew 12:23). When Jesus healed a crippled man, the response was similar. “*And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”*” The effect of the miracle was to convince the people of both who Jesus was and the truth of what he said. There are countless examples of verification of truth by miracles. The purpose of a miracle was to verify the credentials of the person doing the miracle and speaking.

While some today preach supposed new messages from God and claim to perform miracles, the careful observer will note that those present miracles are not at all like those recorded in Bible days. There is no sufficient verification of their new messages.⁷

The consequence of having a verified, true message from the Creator is great. Such a message would be unique and would deserve the greatest attention and compliance with its directives. Verified divine communication would rise far above any other writings. It would not only possess truth, but also authority. The Bible is such a document.

The Bible also verifies that new teachings which differ from what has already been delivered is *de facto* false. “*But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed*” (Galatian 1:8).⁸ Any addition or subtraction from the words of the Bible is condemned (Revelation 22:18, 19). Those who bring new teachings to the world today not only face the hurdle of a lack of verification, they also face the insurmountable task of discounting what is already verified and condemns their new teaching.

⁷ There is ample evidence from the Bible itself that true miracles ended near the end of the 1st century AD. Such a termination should not be surprising given that the purpose of the miracles was to confirm the Scriptures which, by the end of the 1st century, were complete and fully verified. The discussion of the end of the age of miracles is, however, beyond the scope of our study.

⁸ It is ironic that both Islam and Mormonism were both reported to have been delivered by angels. Yet both faiths originated long after these words were penned by Paul.

Authoritative

The Bible is authoritative. To say the Bible is authoritative is to say that it is a standard.

Specifically, it is a standard of,

- thought (2 Corinthians 10:5),
- conduct (Colossians 3:17)
- worship (1 Corinthians 11:17-26; 1 Corinthians 14:40 *et al*)

But why is the Bible authoritative? Why do we declare the Bible to be authoritative while dismissing the Koran, the Book of Mormon or many other books that claim similar authority?

The Bible is authoritative because of its origin. If, as we argued above, the Bible is a verified document from our Creator, its authority is inherent. It cannot be separated from its source. The Scriptures are from the only one who could create the cosmos by a word. They are from the only one who could breathe life into the lifeless. They are from the only one who can sweep aside the laws of nature at a moment's thought.

The Christian would do well to give serious thought to the authority of the Bible. To violate its authority is to position oneself in opposition to God – a place no right thinking person would want to be. Biblical authority may be categorized in two ways, prohibitive and prospective.

Prohibitive

There are things the Bible tells a person *not* to do. The 10 Commandments of the old Law of Moses are one example among many (Exodus 20:1-17⁹; Acts 11:9; Romans 6:13; Romans 11:20; 1

⁹ The 10 Commandments are commonly held to authoritative today but that is incorrect. The 10 Commandments represent the beginning of the law given through Moses to a specific group of people. Exodus 20:2 has God addressing those people that he brought “*out of the land of Egypt.*” That may only apply to the Jews. If we adopt the 10 Commandments *in toto* today, we must also adopt the remaining laws given at Sinai too. That would include all of the animal sacrifices, execution of those working on the Sabbath and the stoning of wayward

Corinthians 6:9, *et al*). Most understand prohibitive authority. We use it with our children. We may say, “do not play with fire,” or “don’t play in the street.” As children grow older they are taught other similar lessons like “do not run a red light” or “do not speed.” We understand prohibitions.

In the New Testament¹⁰ the prohibitions are anchored around matters of spiritual weight. Christians are warned against lying, gossip, sexual sin, covetousness, etc.

Some reject those prohibitions and persist with conduct that violates the authority of Scripture. God allows that choice but promises consequences for sin.

Proscriptive

Proscriptive authority commands an action, behavior or attitude. These are things the Bible tells us *to do*. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:19, 20 and Mark 16:15, 16 illustrates. Disciples are told to “go and make disciples of all nations.” This is a proscriptive command to act. Other proscriptive commands include the command to love (Romans 12:10; 1 John 3:23), the command to submit (Romans 13:1; Colossians 3:18; Hebrews 13:17; James 4:7), the command to restore the sinful (Galatians 6:1), the command to repent (Acts 3:19; 17:30) and the command to be baptized (Acts 2:38).

Again, we understand how this applies to our children in daily life. We tell them to “clean up your room” or “do your homework.” As adults we are told to “pay our taxes” or we are told when to be at work and when to leave. Proscriptive authority is well known and understood.

children and adulterous women. It is true that many of the Decalogue (9 of 10) are restated in Christianity but not as part of the Law of Moses.

¹⁰ The New Testament or new covenant is the standard or law by which believers live and against which they will be judged.

Authoritative Text and Worship

The realm of Christian worship generates many questions about what is, and is not, acceptable in worship. Are we free to worship God in any way we choose? Does God have the right to require worship in a certain way? Has he asserted that right? Is it acceptable for the worshipper to change what the Worshipped has demanded?

These are all excellent questions and bear directly on our discussion of the authoritative text. Perhaps a single question can keep us on point in this discussion. If God has commanded, can we change his command?

Although the details are unclear, Cain failed to worship God appropriately (Genesis 4). He was rebuked by God. All four of the High Priest's sons failed in their worship to God. Two of them were struck dead and the remaining two were allowed to live (Leviticus 10). What was their error? Improper worship. In the New Testament, the church in Corinth was rebuked by Paul for a variety of improper worship issues (1 Corinthians 11:17 ff; 1 Corinthians 12:1 ff).

The target or object of worship is God for he seeks those who will worship him (John 4:20-24). Specifically, he seeks those who will worship him in truth (John 4:24). If a man can worship in truth, he may certainly worship falsely. False worship is akin to vain worship, something rejected by Jesus. *"You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men' "* (Matthew 15:7-9). These people teach man's commands and not God's.

The point seems clear. We worship according to God's commands and reject the commands of men. Since the Bible is the authoritative word of God we turn to its verified, inspired, pages to discover those commands.

Sometimes the Bible gives a direct command for worship. For example we are told to participate in the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-26; 1 Corinthians 16:2). But the Bible also authorizes through approved apostolic examples. The apostles were approved by God through the miracles they performed. So when we observe them participating in some worship activity we may safely know that such an activity is good and approved of. For example, Christians assembled together for worship on the first day of the week (Sunday). Apostles were present in those assemblies. We may conclude with certainty that the church is to assemble for worship on Sunday. This authority is from an approved, apostolic example.

When we wander from such authority, that is, when we do things in worship not authorized by the Bible, we presume to know the mind of God. Presumptuousness is sin (1 Samuel 15:23).

Conclusion

So then, the text of Scripture alone guides us in every aspect of life. Anything and everything we need to know is found in the pages of the Holy Bible. Because the Bible is from God it is both trustworthy and useful. As we close, we again observe the text, 1 Timothy 3:16, 17 that we began with. The inspired word is useful to change us and make us complete in Christ. It is essential for us to know the word of God so that we might conform ourselves and be prepared for his certain return.