

# What Is Inspiration?

*Dave Leonard*

Peter penned: **“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”** (2 Peter 1:20-21). The Scriptures claim inspiration and because of that validity, they are authoritative.

The phrase, “It is written...” appears numerous times in the New Testament and the emphasis of that phrase is that it is used to authenticate the truthfulness of a teaching. Our Lord used this introductory initiative three times in responding to the devil’s temptations. What should we learn from that divine usage? Christ regarded the Scriptures as being authoritative for determining right from wrong and truth from error. Paul used the same phrase in his writings: **“For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God”** (Romans 14:11). What the Scriptures taught was recognized as authoritative for Paul and that was passed on through his preaching and writings.

Christ declared: **“...the Scripture cannot be broken”** (John 10:35). They still cannot be broken. They are absolute, objective, all-sufficient and authoritative. They cannot be broken or changed because they are from God.

What is inspiration? The word “inspired” is used only once in the New Testament and that is in 2 Timothy 3:16. The literal meaning of the word is “God breathed.” The source of inspiration is God, the instruments of inspiration are men chosen by God to speak and write His Word.

Jesus promised the apostles they would be the recipients of inspiration: **“But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you”** (Matthew 10:19-20).

It is important that we understand the human element does not diminish the inspired message. As we look at the different books of the Bible, we are able to identify the various vocabularies, languages and personalities of the inspired writers. But that does not deny or defect inspiration.

Paul shows the process: **“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual”** (1 Corinthians 2:12-13). God is the origin of truth. The Holy Spirit was provided with the heavenly assignment to inspire, direct and guide the chosen men to write and record the words of truth. We can be confident that the inspired Word of God has been transmitted without corruption of its message. Christ promised: **“Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away”** (Mark 13:31).

But why do we have so many differing views of the Bible? Besides the blatant

rejection of inspiration, there are many false views regarding the authority of the Bible. These views are based upon the redefining of inspiration on one hand and the twisting of the Scriptures on the other hand through false hermeneutics and interpretation and application of the Scriptures.

#1. Some agree the Bible is inspired; but, by that term they mean only that the Scriptures are the product of men with paranormal religious insights. In other words, they think of the Bible the same way they think of the Koran or the book of Mormon. Those who hold this type of view look at the Old Testament as a collection of folk stories first passed down by verbal traditions, then recorded by men who wanted to glorify the Jewish nation. They believe the New Testament to be the product of second century followers of Jesus who glamorized His life and His teachings. This kind of view does well to make the Bible an old book for devotional reading; but certainly not a standard to direct a person's life or to provide hope in death.

#2. Some call the Bible inspired; but, they mean that only the passages they define as religious truths are inspired. To this group, the dates numbers, places and events of the Bible reflect only the limited knowledge of the writers and those things are not necessarily accurate.

The late brother J. W. McGarvey, in his book, *Biblical Criticism*, wrote of this false view of inspiration: "Still another theory teaches that the sacred writers were guided by the Holy Spirit in all matters essential to the great purposes of revelation, such as matters of doctrine, morals, and faith; but, in all other matters they were left to their natural powers, and that therefore they were, in regard to these, as liable to mistakes as other men."

This view nullifies a part of what was written by inspiration. We see this same kind of false view of inspiration in the doctrine of those who believe the much of the Bible is myth. They advocate the myths of the Bible need to be cut away or demythologized from the kernel of religious truth. The peripheral myths would, according to this group, consist of the specifics of worship (like instrumental music in worship) and the role of women in the public assembly. Those things were decided by cultural preferences rather than divine directive from God. And because the culture has changed since the time those things were written, the Scriptures need to be modified to fit contemporary times.

#3. Some accept the Scriptures as inspired but incomplete in authorizing what may be done in the work and worship of the church. This view basically states that what the Scriptures authorize we must do; but, when the Scriptures are silent, then we can do what we want. There are two differing camps when it comes to the silence of the Bible. One group suggests that if the Bible does not specifically condemn something you want to do, then you are permitted to do it.

Instrumental music in worship is a practice which follows that format. The other camp sees the silence of the Bible as prohibitive. Unless there is Scriptural authority for a practice, it cannot be used and it is on that basis instrumental music in worship is rejected. If we were able to be transported back to the Old Testament and to the time when God was giving the priests instructions regarding their roles in

worship and if we were able to talk to Nadab and Abihu just prior to their death, on which side of this issue would they stand? Would they argue, “Well, God didn’t say not to get the fire from here?” What about if we could hear from them now? Where do you think they stand on the authority of the silence of the Scriptures? **“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not”** (Leviticus 10:1). God did not say a word about where not to get the fire and He did not have to because He told them from where the fire should come. Friends, the sinful practice of instrumental music in worship is not the bottom line reason for division. The real reason is that men hold to different views of Scripture and the way they constitute religious authority.

#4. Some accept the Scriptures as inspired; but, view them as only love letters and ignore them as being the perfect law of liberty. We must absolutely treasure the love and grace of God: **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16). On the other hand, we recognize the righteous judgment of God: **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men...”** (2 Corinthians 5:10-11). Paul joins the two equal attributes together: **“Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in *his* goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off”** (Romans 11:22). The apostle of love, John, is also the apostle who wrote: **“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments”** (1 John 5:3). The mercy and justice of God cannot be pitted against each other. They both describe the perfect balance of God and without that perfect balance God would cease to be God.

Our view of Scripture determines our faith and practice. If we reject the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God, these words are of no value. If we accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God, these words serve as the source of our faith and the standard for life, worship and service. If the Bible is the Word of God, and I contend it is, then the promises God makes will come to pass.