SCRIPTURE: GOD’S WRITTEN WORD

by

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Chapter 1

Background: God’s Spoken Word and the Role of Scripture

A. God’s Spoken Word

It is important to recognize that the word of God is first of all the word God speaks. God communicates: His word goes forth. God speaks in manifold ways. Let us note where and how this happens.

God speaks His word in and through creation. “The heavens are telling the glory of God.... Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge” (Psalm 19:1-2).¹ The Psalmist elsewhere says, “For ever, O Lord, thy word is firmly fixed in the heavens" (Psalm 119:89). The word God speaks in the heavens is a silent word: “There is no speech, nor are there words... yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (Psalm 19:3-4). God continually speaks in and through His creation proclaiming His glory.

God speaks His word in and through His prophets and apostles. It sometimes came to them in a vision, sometimes in a dream, sometimes mouth to mouth²—but in any event it was the word of God spoken to them. Quite frequent in the Old Testament is some such expression as “The word of the LORD that came to... saying.”³ That word, in turn, was communicated to others. In the New Testament the apostles not only on occasion had visions and dreams wherein God spoke,⁴ but also they belonged to the immediate circle that heard the word of God directly through Jesus Christ and thereby declared to others that word.

God speaks His word in and through His Son. “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son” (Hebrews 1:1). Jesus Himself is the Word of God (John 1:1), and in His person,

¹ Revised Standard Version (RSV). This translation will be used throughout unless otherwise noted.
² E.g., Numbers 12:6-8—“Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses...With him I speak mouth to mouth.”
³ See, e.g., the opening statement in Jonah and Zechariah. Also note Jeremiah 1:4.
⁴ See, e.g., Acts 9:3-9; 16:9-10.
words, and deeds communicates the message of God to all mankind. Jesus Christ, in the climactic sense, is the spoken word of God.

God speaks His word in and through the church. “Through the church the manifold wisdom of God... [is to be] made known...” (Ephesians 3:10). The word of God thus is also the word proclaimed by the church. Peter speaks of “the living and abiding word of God” and adds that “the word is the good news which was preached to you” (I Peter 1:23, 25). So Paul can say to Timothy: “Preach the word” (II Timothy 4:2). The preaching of good news, therefore, is the preaching of the word of God.

God speaks His word in the heart of the believer. Moses in making reference to God’s commandment says: “the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it” (Deuteronomy 30:14). If this was true of the Old Testament believers, how much more of the Christian believer. For within him is the “implanted word” (James 1:21), the word that God speaks: it is living and growing. The continuing challenge was spoken by Paul: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom” (Colossians 3:16). Ever and again God speaks His word within the believer who is open to what God has to say.

Thus in many ways—in creation, prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ, the church, the believer—God speaks His word. The word of God thereby is the spoken word of God.

**B. The Role of Scripture**

From what has been said, it is apparent that the word of God is not simply identical with the Scriptures. The word of God in creation, the incarnate Word of God, the proclaimed word by the church: none is directly Scripture. Even the word that came to a prophet or an apostle was not, as such, Scripture—though it became that when set down in
writing. The word “in the heart” may be Scripture, but it also may be an “implanted” or “engrafted” word that is God’s peculiar word and work in a particular individual.

In all of this, however, the Scriptures occupy a crucially important role. First, we may speak of the indispensability of Scripture. In relation to the word spoken in creation, the Scriptures make for clarification and discrimination. From a purely natural perspective there are aspects of creation today in the visible heavens and the earth that do not seem to proclaim God and His glory, but rather randomness, disorder, and evil. Nature does not always seem benign in the face of upheavals of earth, violent storms, ravages of wild animals, and the like. The “glasses” of Scripture are needed to truly apprehend God’s handiwork in it all, and to accurately hear what God is saying. The Scriptures are indispensable also in that they are the only record available of the word spoken through the prophets and apostles, and incarnated in Jesus Christ. Without Scriptures we would be dependent on oral tradition with all its ambiguities and uncertainties. The Scriptures, further, are indispensable as a guide for the proclamation of the church. Without the original witness, the message preached and taught would soon lose its bearings. Concerning the matter of the word in the heart, unless there is the constant check of Scripture there is danger of confusing God’s word with one’s own personal experience.

This leads, secondly, to a recognition of the normativity of Scripture. Since the Scriptures are the written record of the prophetic, incarnate, and apostolic word—namely, the special revelation of God—they are the norm of all Christian faith and practice. Whatever does not measure up to biblical teaching, or departs therefrom, is a foreign intrusion. Scripture thus is “for reproof, for correction” (II Timothy 3:16). It is both governor and standard: governor of true belief and practice and standard by which all is judged. Everything must be put to the test of Scripture.

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5 Reference here, of course, is made to those prophets and apostles whose writings became Scripture. There were also prophets in the Old Testament, and the apostles and prophets in the New Testament who surely heard and spoke God’s word but who left behind no scriptural record.
6 James 1:21, King James Version (KJV).
8 The word spoken in creation is a general revelation of God to all mankind, and the word spoken in the heart of the believer is an individual word. But neither of these is the special revelation which God gave through His biblical prophets and apostles, and preeminently through His own Son. (The reader is invited to see my Renewal Theology, Vol. I, God, the World, and Redemption, Chap. 2, “The Knowledge of God,” for a fuller discussion of general and special revelation.)
There is always the danger of tradition becoming a second norm, or—worse still—the primary norm. Such, unfortunately, is the case in Roman Catholicism where tradition is placed on a plane of equality with the Scripture, and as such in time becomes the dominant factor. Thus growing traditions with little or no recourse to Scripture, such as papal infallibility, the immaculate conception, and the assumption of Mary, are finally declared to be “revealed dogmas.” Scripture has ceased to be the norm, whatever claims may verbally be made about it. But this also happens in any church, often in subtle ways, when a confession or creed is viewed as the standard for the church’s faith and practice. Thus, for example, unreserved commitment to the creeds of the early church councils or to the confession of a particular denomination is once again—whatever the claims to the contrary—a way of going beyond the normativity of Scripture. Hence, it is essential that creedal and confessional statements, for all their importance, remain secondary to Scripture.

Also there is the danger of lessening the normativity of Scripture by giving acceptance to later supposed revelations that actually contravene or supplement the special revelation in the Bible. In a quite radical fashion this occurs, for example, in the Muslim religion (Islam) where a presumed additional revelation from God (Allah) is given that, despite frequent reference to the Scriptures of Old and New Testaments, becomes the final authority: it is no longer a matter of what the Bible teaches but what the Koran says. Of

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According to the official statement of Vatican Council II: “It is not from sacred Scripture alone that the church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and sacred scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence” (The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Chap. 2, Sect. 9).

E.g., The Dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary was so declared in 1950 by Pope Pius XII: “By the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by Our own authority, we pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.”

An illustration of this is to be found in one of the ordination questions of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church: “Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?” If such church statements contain “the system of doctrine,” they are likely to become the norm above Scripture.

There is no intention here to deny the importance of doctrinal statements, or even of subscription thereto. “The Bible is our creed” sounds superficially good, but the Bible as such is not a creed, or even a confession. Consequently there may be good reason to draw up a statement of faith to declare a church’s stance. However, when the claim is thereafter made, in some way or other, that such a statement is the truth of the Bible, Scripture’s normativity has been transgressed. The only proper way to go is to recognize that any doctrinal formulation, whether of creed or confession, must always be subordinate to Scripture and is subject
course, in the case of the Muslim religion there is no pretense of being or remaining Christian. A less radical example is that of Mormonism which claims to be Christian but, like Islam, has an additional sacred book, *The Book of Mormon*,\(^{13}\) that is held to have been given by revelation. Thus the Bible becomes only a part of revealed truth; and, by virtue of *The Book of Mormon* being more recent, the normativity of Scripture is totally eclipsed.

This may also happen within recognized Christian bodies wherever there are claims to revelation that go beyond Scripture or purport to be authoritative interpretations of Scripture. An example of this is a book on angels wherein “direct messages” interpreting Scripture were presumably given by angels, and the claim made that “part of the special work of God is doing is a broader revelation of Himself through messages by angelic visitation.”\(^{14}\) A “broader revelation”—whatever the claims to the primacy of Scripture, or that such revelation is only a fuller understanding of Scripture—is actually going beyond Scripture. If *an angel* speaks, his message surely must be the norm by which Scripture is to be interpreted!

Another, often more subtle, danger is that of allowing cultural conditioning to become the norm of truth rather than Scripture. For example, the present day concern on the part of many for self-realization, or self-achievement, has frequently led to viewing the Gospel as the guide to that end. The Bible becomes practically a handbook to achieving the self-fulfilled life. Under such cultural conditioning the message of Jesus about self-denial, taking up a cross, and following Him (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23) is not only translated into a contemporary key but it is transformed\(^{15}\) into something entirely different by the cultural setting. The Scripture ceases to be normative.

Likewise, personal experience, particularly of a striking kind, can lead to a departure from the rule of Scripture. For example, this occurred at the time of the Reformation when some of the “left-wing” Reformers claimed that “having the Spirit” they

\[^{13}\text{In addition, *The Doctrine and the Covenants* and *The Pearl of Great Price* are acclaimed as authoritative.}\]

\[^{14}\text{Angels on Assignment* by Roland Buck (Houston: Hunter Books, 1979), p. 9.}\]

\[^{15}\text{“Translation” is always to be desired. Theology needs constantly to present biblical truth in such fashion (e.g., by making use of modern terminology) that it “gets through.” “Transformation” takes the additional—and unfortunate—step of allowing the culture to re-shape and thereby transform the message. On this, see *New Directions in Theology Today* by William Hordern (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), Vol. I, *Introduction*, Chap. VII, “Theology in Dialogue.”}\]
no longer needed the Scripture and its rule. Similarly, various forms of pietism later
exalted feeling in Christian experience so that while the Bible generally was regarded as
the word of God, the actual norm for Christian faith and practice became the inward
experience. In the twentieth century one form of this has been demonstrated in
“existential” approaches to the Bible where existentialist analyses of human
existence—e.g., the individual in his anxiety, search for freedom, desire for authentic
existence, and the like—become the touchstone of Scripture and its interpretation.16

We may now, in the third place, speak of the authoritativeness of Scripture.
Because of the fact that the Scriptures are both indispensable to the Word of God spoken in
multiple ways (through creation, prophets, Christ, apostles, and church) and are normative
for the special revelation (in prophets, Christ, apostles), they are authoritative for Christian
faith and practice.

The authoritativeness resides, for one thing, in that what is spoken through the
multiple ways described is given clarification (the word in creation), expression (the word
in prophets, Christ, and apostles), and direction (the word in the church). Hence Scriptures,
by virtue of this comprehensive role, occupy the place of authority. Only they can be
turned to as the authority for what is declared in and through all these media.

Again, authoritativeness inheres in the fact that the Scriptures are records set down
by those who were participants in God’s special revelation. They ring with the authority of
participants in this revelation,17 being first-hand witnesses or in close proximity to those
who were.18 Since the Scriptures occupy such a position, they have an authoritative role.19

Finally, the authoritativeness of Scripture is a result of their being a written record.
To be sure, the oral word may also have authority and be handed on to others. For

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16 Tillich in his development of an existentialist theology and Bultmann in his attempt at New Testament
“de-mythologization” are primary examples.
17 In the Old Testament, for example, whether it be history, prophecy, psalms, or wisdom literature,
everything is declared with a vigorous note of authority.
18 One of the later tests for inclusion of a book in the New Testament canon was apostolic authority. Do the
presumed Scriptures, or a particular Scripture, represent the original apostolic circle?
19 We are speaking of the Scriptures that make up the canon. By “canon” is meant the list of books in the Old
and New Testaments that are recognized as authoritative. They include 39 books in the Old Testament and
27 in the New Testament (Roman Catholicism includes a number of other books known as the Apocrypha in
the Old Testament; however, Protestantism does not recognize the Apocryphal books as canonical [none of
the Apocryphal books are found in the official Hebrew canon]). The word “canon” means “rule” or
“standard,” hence the list of 66 authoritative books in the Old and New Testaments.
example, the Scriptures by no means contain all that Jesus said and did;\(^{20}\) hence, the apostles who were with Him undoubtedly passed on other of His teachings. Indeed, between the first proclamation of the Gospel and the first writing of what came to be New Testament Scripture, there was at least a generation when the only authority was the oral word or tradition. Paul writes to the Corinthians: “I commend you because... you maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you” (I Corinthians 11:2). Hence the oral word preceded the written word, and doubtless both accompanied and followed it. However (as earlier mentioned), in time the oral word or tradition inevitably becomes uncertain and ambiguous. Thus the importance of Scripture as an authoritative record increases with the passage of years.

Chapter 2
Evidence of Scripture as God’s Written Word

This leads to the next affirmation, namely, that Scripture is the written word of God, or the word of God in writing. As we have observed above, there is, first, the spoken word of God—and we have considered various relations of Scripture to it. Now we move on to deal with the quite important affirmation that the Scriptures themselves are God’s written word.

A. The Self-Attestation of Scripture

The classical verse in this connection is II Timothy 3:16, which begins: “All Scripture is inspired by God.” The word translated as “inspired” means literally “God-breathed.” Thus does Paul claim for the totality of Scripture—“all”—an immediate inspiration from God. It is not said that the Scriptures are breathed into, rather they are God-breathed; it is not so much “inspiration” but “spiration.” Hence, they are the product of God’s Spirit—the Holy Spirit. The conclusion: the Scriptures—as God-breathed—are His written word.

We may look again at the words “all Scripture.” What does this include? Undoubtedly, at least the Old Testament scriptures are being referred to. Just prior to this verse Paul speaks to Timothy about “how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings...” (II Timothy 3:15). “Sacred writings” may also be translated as “holy scriptures,” thus making reference to the Old Testament and possibly certain Christian writings. In any event Paul is claiming for the Old Testament, at least, the status of all

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21 As the New International Version (NIV) translates.
22 The Greek word is pasa, which may also be rendered as “every” with the possible translation, “Every Scripture inspired by God” (see the New American Standard Bible [NASB] margin.). This translation (as in the main text of the New English Bible [NEB]), implying that not all Scriptures are inspired, would scarcely seem to be Paul’s meaning.
23 “God-breathed”—theopneustos in the Greek—also means “God-Spirited.”
24 As in KJV and NIV. The Greek is hiera grammata, literally “sacred letters.”
25 Hiera grammata “is the name for the holy scriptures of the Old Testament in Greek-speaking Judaism” (Dibelius, as quoted in The Interpreter’s Bible [Nashville: Abingdon, 1952] on this text). The expression may also refer to certain “Christian documents, even Gospels as well as Epistles” (ibid.). The context,
Scripture as given by immediate inspiration of God. One further Pauline statement may be noted: “whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction” (Romans 15:4). “Whatever,” by definition, signifies “all”: and in this instance would seem clearly to point to the whole of the Old Testament.

Now, turning specifically to the New Testament, we observe the words in II Peter which speak of Paul’s letters, plus other undesignated writings, as Scripture: “our beloved brother Paul wrote to you... in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures” (3:15-16). The word “all” is likewise used here; hence this would obviously include Paul’s second letter to Timothy, and since “the other scriptures” are mentioned, the implication is clear that all of Paul’s letters are Scripture. What "the other scriptures" are, in addition to Paul’s letters, is not specified, but in all likelihood the reference is to other portions of what will later become the New Testament canon.

We may conclude this section with the observation that Scripture attests to its own immediate inspiration. II Timothy 3:16 which declares “all scripture” to be “God-breathed” is itself (according to II Peter 3:15-16) Scripture. Thus there is unmistakably the self-attestation of Scripture to being God’s written word.26

B. The Frequent Identification of Scripture with God Speaking

Reference has been made to God’s spoken word as not being simply identical with Scripture. However—it is now quite important to add—Scriptures often are referred to as God speaking. That is to say, while God’s word is surely more than Scripture (for example, God speaks in and through creation, incarnation, and proclamation), it is also declared to be Scripture. In such cases, God speaking and Scripture speaking are viewed as identical.

A number of examples are readily at hand. Jesus Himself on one occasion says: “Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife’” (Matthew 19:4-5). The Old Testament passage, Genesis 2:24, from which this

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26 The significance of this self-attestation of Scripture is obvious, for if scriptural testimony is accepted in validating other doctrines, then the testimony to itself is of the first rank of importance.
quotation is taken, makes no reference to the words as being spoken by God. The words would seem simply to be those of the writer; however, Jesus refers to them as spoken by God. Also, we may observe instances in Paul’s letters where Scripture and God are actually interchangeable terms. “For the scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘I have raised you up’” (Romans 9:17), and “the scripture... preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed’” (Galatians 3:8). In both cases these Old Testament words spoken by God (see Exodus 9:16 and Genesis 12:3) are identified with Scripture speaking. One further example, in Hebrews: “as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts’” (3:7-8), a quotation from Psalm 95:7-8 where the Psalmist is exhorting the people. Thus, again, a particular Scripture is identified with God (in this case, the Holy Spirit) speaking.27

In the same vein there is the occasional designation of Scriptures as “the oracles of God.” Paul speaks of the Jews as having been “entrusted with the oracles of God” (Romans 3:2), and in Hebrews reference is made to the “elementary principles of the oracles of God” (Hebrews 5:12).28 Scriptures, accordingly, are divine sayings or utterances.29 Hence, once again, there is a biblical identification of Scripture with God speaking. One further word might be added: it is quite significant that the commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai are described in Acts 7:38 as “living oracles.” Accordingly, the law—and, by extension, the whole of Scripture—is the living voice of God.

C. Scripture as Self-Authenticating

In addition to the Scriptures’ own verbal witness (attestation and identification) to being God’s word in writing, they bear a character of self-authentication; they show themselves to be the word of God.30 Scriptures convey throughout a note of magisterial

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27 Boettner puts it succinctly: “In the minds of Christ and the apostles there was an absolute identification between the text of the Old Testament and the voice of the living God” (The Inspiration of Scriptures [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1937], p.31).

28 NASB

29 The word translated “oracles” above is logia. In Greek literature a logion was a short saying originating from a divinity, so in the New Testament signifies a divine utterance as oracle of God.

30 According to Calvin, “Scripture bears upon the face of it as clear evidence of its truth, as white and black do of their color, sweet and bitter of their taste” (Institutes [Beveridge tr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957], Vol. I, Chap. 7, Sect. 2)
authority; they speak forthrightly of God and His activity on almost every page; they move with assurance between the two vast poles of creation and consummation; they focus on the stupendous theme of divine incarnation and redemption; and though written over hundreds of years by scores of authors in many forms—history, law, prophecy, wisdom literature, gospel, epistle, apocalypse—there is the amazing fact of an overall unity. The evidence of a divine hand in the writing is unmistakable.

D. Scriptures are Confirmed as God’s Word by the Holy Spirit

Finally, we speak of the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit: the Holy Spirit bears witness that the Scriptures are God’s written word. Hence, climactically the testimony is not that of Scripture to itself or about itself; rather it resides in the highest possible certitude, namely, the Holy Spirit. Since all Scripture is “God-breathed,” “God-Spirited”—given by the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit—then the ultimate assurance of its divine authority is the inner witness of the same Spirit.

This means, accordingly, that the believing community and the individual in whom the Holy Spirit moves and dwells has the ever-present certitude of the Scriptures being God’s written word. Paul writes that “we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit” (I Corinthians 2:12-13 NASB). Thus the Holy Spirit, whom believers have received, alone can bring knowledge and validation of the divine authority and truth of Scripture.

One of the most significant features of the contemporary move of the Holy Spirit in many believer’s lives is the way in which He has brought about also an increasing regard for the high authority of Scripture. The entire Bible is freshly recognized as God’s own written word. With the breath of the Holy Spirit bringing new life and power, there is at the same time a quickening sense of the Scriptures being God’s word in writing. All of Scripture, Old Testament and New, speaks in such fashion that its words are recognized as the voice of God. Truly the identification (earlier mentioned) of “the Scripture says” with “God says” is no longer a formal matter of recognition; it becomes deeply experiential. One *knows* that when Scripture speaks God speaks. That the Scriptures are
“God-breathed,” and therefore totally His word in writing, is a matter of immediate apprehension by the “Spirit-breathed” community and person.\footnote{Clark Pinnock has put it well: “The moving of the Spirit accomplishes more on behalf of biblical authority than all the arguments of conservative evangelicals could” (Biblical Authority, ed. By Jack Rogers [Waco: Word Books, 1977], pp. 72-73).}
Chapter 3

The Purpose of the Scriptures

This leads to a consideration of the purpose of the Scriptures. Why were they written? To what end has God set forth His word in writing? Are they a guide for any and everything, or do they have a rather clearly defined purpose? Let us examine this matter carefully.

A. The "Things" of God

It is apparent that Scriptures throughout are basically concerned with God and His ways—from "In the beginning God created" (Genesis 1: 1) to "Even so, come, LORD Jesus" (Revelation 22:20). The Bible is about God, His ways with the world and man, His purposes from creation to consummation. Paul speaks of "the things of God" (I Corinthians 2:11 KJV) which only the Spirit knows, yet by that same Spirit we may be given understanding. The Scriptures throughout treat of divine matters, not in themselves, but in relation to the world He has made.

Hence whatever God does, whether in creation, or covenant, or redemption, or glorification—or in any other area—is a concern of the Bible. This is to say, then, that the purpose of Scriptures, in the broadest sense, is to portray the mighty acts of God, their connection with the world and man, and the eschatological future.

We might single out the word "hope." Paul says, in another place, that "whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4 NASB). Surely if that was true of the "earlier times"—times of the Old Testament era—it is no less true of the New, where hope is a continuing theme. In a world that often seems rather meaningless and even purposeless, the Bible cries forth, "Hope thou in God." The Bible was written that we might have a genuine and sure hope.34

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32 The Bible is in no way a book of speculation on the mystery of God’s being, His ways in eternity, etc. It is always, and everywhere, concerned only with God in His relation to His creation.

33 An expression thrice repeated in Psalms 42 and 43 (KJV).

34 Hope is vividly described in Hebrews as “a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (6:19).
In sum, the Bible enables us to know God—in His majesty and wonder, in the revelation of His grace and truth, in the unfolding of the mysterious purpose of His will. There is no other such book.

B. The Way of Salvation

The Scriptures at heart are the declaration of God’s way of salvation. From the narrative of the early fall of man onward, there is the continuing story of God’s activity to bring about mankind’s redemption. Indeed, outside the opening two chapters in the Bible (Genesis 1 and 2) depicting the creation of the world and man, and the final two chapters (Revelation 21 and 22) depicting the new heavens and the new earth, all in between is the unfolding drama of salvation. There are many aspects, of course: for example, the early promise, the calling of Israel, the coming of Christ, the work of redemption, the final victory over evil—but through it all God’s will and purpose to save is vividly set forth.

So it is that Paul speaks of the “sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (II Timothy 3:15). Salvation is the principal matter; hence through Scripture one may be instructed in the way of salvation. Thus the good news of salvation—the Gospel—is the central theme. It is “the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures” (Romans 1:1-2), namely, the Old Testament, and is fulfilled thereafter in Jesus Christ and the way of salvation which He made possible.

The Scriptures, therefore, focus upon Christ as the Savior. According to Jesus himself, “it is they the Scriptures that bear witness to me” (John 5:39). Indeed, it is said of the risen Lord, in relation to the Emmaus disciples, that “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). If the Scriptures of the Old Testament testify of Christ, how much more those of the New! Hence to set forth Christ as Savior and Lord is the thrust of Scripture from beginning to end.

By the exposition of the Gospel—Jesus Christ and salvation—the Scriptures declare a divine mystery. Paul writes about “my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ” as being “according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages

35 Literally, “to make wise” (sophisai)—so in NIV and KJV.
but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings [or ‘Scriptures’] is made known to all nations…to bring about the obedience of faith” (Romans 16:25-26). Thus the Scriptures make known a mystery long hidden, namely the Gospel of salvation, and their purpose is to bring about faith among all people.

To summarize: The heart of Scripture is the message of salvation and the way whereby it is to be received. It is this central purpose that binds everything together.

C. Direction for Living

Finally, the Scriptures are written to set forth the way of true living. The laws, commandments, and injunctions of the Old Testament are declared to be the way of life. The Israelites are enjoined to obey the commandments and live: “choose life, that you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). In the New Testament, even more fully, the way of life in Christ and in His commandments (for example, the Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5-7) is declared. The Christian has been given the ability through redemption in Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to do what the Israelite could not consistently do, namely to walk in God’s will and way. The Scriptures are his guide.

This brings us back to the words of Paul about Scripture: “All scripture is inspired by God.” The verse continues with the words: “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” (I Timothy 3:16-17). “Reproof,” “correction,” “training”—all belong to the Christian walk. Scriptures have much value in showing the way wherein “the man of God”—the believer—is to live his daily life.

One more verse may be quoted, this time from the Psalmist: “Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). The word of God in its written form is for all believers a guide for the way wherein they should go.
Chapter 4
The Mode of Writing

Scripture, as has been noted, is inspired by God; yet it is obvious that men did the writing, hence, both God and man are involved. How are we to understand the mode of this involvement?

A. Divine Origin

We begin with the affirmation of the divine origination of the Scriptures. This, of course, is declared in the statement about Scriptures being “God-breathed.” The Scriptures come from God; they are His word in writing.

This means that, whatever the human involvement, man is not the originator of what is written as Scripture. Peter in speaking about a “prophecy of scripture” adds that “no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (II Peter 1: 20-21). It is not human impulse, or will, that is the source of Scriptural prophecy36; rather it is the setting down in writing of what men spoke as they were moved, or “carried along,”37 by the Holy Spirit. Though reference here is to Scriptural prophecy, it would seem to apply to the full range of Scripture. The parallel imagery of “God-breathed” in relation to “all Scripture” suggests that the phrase “carried along by the Holy Spirit” refers likewise to the totality of Scriptural writing.

Man is definitely not the originator of Scripture. Scripture does not derive from human but from divine inspiration. Inspiration in connection with Scripture accordingly is not to be viewed as human inspiration, namely, a high level of imaginative human activity. It is sometimes said of a Shakespeare or a Milton that his writings show an inspired mind at work. For in such persons there is creative genius with natural powers lifted up to inspired heights that most people never experience. The Scriptures, however, are quite different: it is not a matter of creative genius or natural abilities being elevated.

36 “Prophecy of scripture” is doubtless to be understood more broadly than portions of Scripture usually designated as “prophecy.”
37 “Carried along” is the NIV translation. The imagery is that of wind (often identified in Scripture with the Spirit of God) carrying along a boat with sails. For example, in Acts 27:15 and 17 the same Greek word translated as “carried along” in II Peter 1:21 is used to depict a sailing vessel “driven” by the wind.)
Rather it is the Holy Spirit, so to speak, “coming down,” at work in a variety of persons who may have little or no claim to creative genius and extraordinary ability.

Truly, whatever is set forth in Scripture—prophecy; poetry, history, or whatever else—is to be understood as ultimately of divine origination.

B. Human Activity

It is important now to emphasize that human activity is very much involved in the writing of Scripture. For however true it is that the Scriptures are God’s word in writing, even “God-breathed,” or “God-Spirited,” they are still human words, words written by men. Hence, while it is proper to speak of divine origination, there is also human authorship throughout. Thus there are books of Moses, psalms of David, letters of Paul. Note, for example, in the letter to the Romans it is not “the Holy Spirit to the Romans,” but “Paul…to all God’s beloved in Rome” (Romans 1:1,7).

Accordingly, in the writing of Scripture human faculties come into play. A particular portion of Scripture bears the mark of an individual upon it. The background, experience, style of the author is often readily apparent. Paul does not write like Peter, or Peter like John; their letters differ widely in many ways. Sometimes there is the hard work of compiling historical data, research for accurate facts, and other scholarly activities. There are four Gospels—each marked by the distinctive character and orientation of the human author. Frequently different ways of expressing the same truth are employed, depending both on the writer's background and the audience to which he addresses himself. The writing of Scripture shows signs of the surrounding culture, the world outlook of the time, the influence of prevailing customs and attitudes: all goes into the human activity of writing Scripture. The diversity in Scripture is as wide as the range of authors and also the many centuries spanning their various writings. The Bible is God's written word in and through the human milieu.

It hardly seems necessary to add that any idea of a divine dictation of Scripture fails to recognize this human element. There are, to be sure, portions of Scripture that are said to be given directly by God, as for example, the Old Testament commandments, wherein
Moses seems largely to occupy the role of a human amanuensis. Also God often speaks directly through his prophets, and the prophets or their scribes put the words down in writing. However, even in such cases, the word of God transcribed through an Isaiah, for example, sounds quite different from that of a Jeremiah or an Amos. God truly speaks, but the message bears the stamp of the human vessel through whom it comes.

C. Superintendence of the Spirit

Finally, the mode of writing of the Scriptures may be described as the superintendence of the Spirit. On the one hand Scripture originates from God, it is “God-breathed”; on the other, human activity is involved in the writing. This means that the divine afflatus does not ordinarily signify the words simply coming from on high, but coming through the human instrument in all its uniqueness and diversity. The Holy Spirit makes use of the vessels He finds; He does not coerce them or blot them out, but speaks in the language of men: their background, idiosyncrasies, culture, and the like. In all of this there is such a superintendence and direction of the Spirit that the writing of Scripture is verily the writing of God’s word.

Let us observe carefully. It is not that human words are so inspired by the Spirit of God that they declare divine truth. It is rather that the human words are God’s words, spoken in and through the variety of the human condition. Paul writes the Thessalonians of his gratitude that “when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). So with the Scriptures, they are not the word of God and the word of man in some kind of dynamic interpenetration, but are really and truly the word of God in and through the word of man. To be sure, the word of God as Scripture is in writing, and—to repeat—such writing undoubtedly is a human activity in all its wide

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39 See Ex. 24:4; 34:27; cf. 24:12; 31:18; 34:1; Dt. 4:13; 10:1-5.
40 A prophetic “Thus says the Lord” may suggest little or no activity on the human side. It is to be recognized, however, that sometimes a word from the Lord comes only after much struggle and prayer. For example, Jeremiah spends ten days in prayer on one occasion before “the word of the LORD came” (see Jeremiah 42:1-7).
41 As in the Incarnation wherein Jesus Christ is both God and man, the two natures constituting one person.
diversity. However there is such a superintendence of the Holy Spirit that what is outwardly a human word is indeed the very word of God.

Finally, this divine superintendence is totally beyond our comprehension. It belongs to the mystery which surrounds all God’s ways and actions. How He accomplishes this through the complexity of the human activity involved, no one can really understand. But that He has done it we know—and shall be forever grateful.
Chapter 5

The Inspiration of Scripture

It is apparent, from what has been said, that inspiration extends to the whole of Scripture. “All Scripture is inspired by God.”

A. Plenary

The word “plenary”—or “plenary inspiration”—is the term frequently employed to affirm that the whole of the Bible is God’s written word. All Scripture, not some, or part, or most of Scripture, but the totality of Scripture is the word of God. The Bible is the word of God throughout.

In this connection a number of questions are often raised. First, what about statements of Paul wherein he claims to be speaking, not the Lord? In writing the Corinthians—I Corinthians 7—Paul says: “To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord” (verse 10). But thereafter he adds: “To the rest I say, not the Lord” (verse 12). If Paul in the last of these two statements disclaims that he is speaking from the Lord, is it proper to view the words that follow as inspired, i.e., the written word of God? Do not Paul’s own words contravene any idea of plenary inspiration, since at least in this chapter a number of statements would seemingly have to be omitted (particularly verses 12 to 40)? The answer to these questions, I believe, is to be found primarily in recognizing that by the title “Lord” Paul is referring to Jesus Christ; thus in the latter two of these instances Paul claims to have no direct word from the Lord Jesus, whereas in the first case the Lord had already spoken on this in His ministry (compare I Corinthians 7:10-11 with Matthew 19:3-9, Mark 10:11, Luke 16:18). So Paul is by no means disclaiming that he speaks God’s word in the latter instances; indeed, the climax of the last verse (40) is Paul’s words: “and I think that I have the Spirit of God.”

Indeed, later on in the same letter Paul

[^42]: Paul’s words, “I think,” should not be viewed as expressing uncertainty. According to the *Expositor’s Greek Testament* (New York: Doran, n.d.), the “I think” is “the language of modesty, not of misgiving. The Apostle commends his advice in all these matters, conscious that it proceeds from the highest source and is not the outcome of mere human prudence or personal inclination” (Vol. II, p. 838). Notice also Paul’s use of “I think” in I Cor. 4:9, where there can be no question of Paul’s being uncertain, or having misgiving, about what he is saying.
bluntly says: “the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment” (14:37 NASB). There is divine authority all through—hence, plenary inspiration.

Second, what about the portions of the Bible that seem invalidated or superseded by other Scriptures? For example, the Old Testament law reads “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” (Deuteronomy 19:21); however, Jesus, quoting these words, adds: “But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil” (Matthew 5:39). Ecclesiastes asserts: “he who is joined with all the living has hope ... For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward” (Ecclesiastes 9:4-5); however, Paul declares: “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (I Corinthians 15:19-20). Job’s “comforters” make long and wordy speeches; however, they are told by God: “you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has” (Job 42:7). Does inspiration actually extend to the words just quoted from Deuteronomy, Ecclesiastes, and many of the speeches in Job?

The answer again is in the affirmative; however, at least two things need to be recognized. First, there is the matter of progressive revelation: the gradual unfolding of God’s truth in the Bible. Hence, the words of Jesus do not invalidate the words of Deuteronomy at the time they were given, nor their basic thrust which is in the direction of justice to prevent overly harsh retaliation. Jesus’ words are not therefore an abolition or contravention of the old law but a fulfillment. So did He declare: “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17). This means, accordingly, that the Old Testament is to be read in the light of the New. In the next instance above, Ecclesiastes and Paul, this again is patently the case, since life after death was not fully revealed until the New Testament period.

Second, the inspiration of Scripture does not mean that everything stated therein is true, but that it is truly and accurately recorded. Ecclesiastes says many other things as well that, rather than declaring God’s truth, demonstrate the searching of one whose announced philosophy is “Vanity of vanities ... All is vanity” (1:2). Ecclesiastes is God’s written word in that all this human search—in its vagaries and vicissitudes—is faithfully recorded.

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41 “Progressive revelation” does not mean a movement from error to truth but from lesser to fuller disclosure of truth.
as well as the final climax where God’s truth is declared: “The end of the matter…Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (12:13). In the case of Job’s comforters, the words spoken are “not right” about God, hence not God’s truth; but they do express, in marked fashion, the views of many who are convinced that all human suffering must be due to human sin and God’s punishment upon it. That such views, contrary to God’s higher truth, are set forth in Scripture by no means invalidates them as being a part of God's written word. Rather do they demonstrate that God wants us to hear such reasonings and arguments so that we might be better prepared to receive His own truth.

Third, what about passages in the Bible that touch upon scientific matters—astronomy, geology, biology, and the like? If some of these seem contrary to modern scientific understanding, does this not invalidate the claim that Scriptures are plenarily inspired? A number of replies, briefly, may be given: (1) The Bible is not a scientific textbook; hence while it does touch upon scientific areas, the concern is not to teach science but the “things” of God. That such “things” do often relate to the realm of science is apparent (no realm is excluded from God), but the focus is primarily on God and His ways. Thus one should not expect from the Bible detailed scientific understanding. (2) The Bible, while not being a scientific manual, is not unscientific. Hence, while not explicitly or in detail scientific, the Bible being throughout God’s written word does not go counter to genuine scientific fact. God, after all, is the God of the universe which the scientist explores. The truth of the scientist is God’s truth: it cannot contradict whatever truth God has disclosed in His written word. (3) Modern scientific understanding is not invariably the truth. No one can rightly question the immense steps forward in scientific knowledge—of the universe, earth, man, nature, and much else—but such progress does not guarantee that scientific understanding itself will always prove adequate or correct. Some things in the Bible may be contrary to contemporary scientific understanding; if so the fault could very well rest with that understanding. God’s truth in the Scriptures cannot contradict His truth in the observable operation of the universe.

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44 Or Futility of futilities….All is futile” (as in the NASB).
45 Recall the Purpose of Scriptures as previously discussed.
B. Verbal

The word “verbal”—or “verbal inspiration”—is the term frequently employed to affirm that each individual part of the Bible is God’s written word. Verbal is opposed to general. The Holy Spirit superintended the writing of Scripture not just in general but also in the choice and expression of words. Paul speaks of imparting truth “in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit” (I Corinthians 2:13). Consequently, each word is given by the Holy Spirit. The Bible is the written word of God even in the minutiae.

By adding the word “verbal” to “plenary” it is emphasized that inspiration includes the details of Scripture. It is not enough to say that the Bible is broadly inspired; it is also the written word of God in every linguistic expression.

One of the most telling examples of this detailed inspiration is the passage where Paul declares a highly important theological truth based not only on a given word but also on a grammatical form of the word: “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ” (Galatians 3:16 NIV). Another striking example is to be found in the use by Jesus Himself of an Old Testament verb and tense to make a crucial point about the resurrection to the Sadducees. He first tells these disbelievers in the resurrection that “you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God.” Then Jesus adds: “And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living” (Matthew 22:31-32). The present tense, “I am,” is the assurance that the dead are resurrected.

Now, again, questions are often raised. First, does not verbal inspiration imply dictation? Plenary inspiration, to some persons, seems a more adequate expression since it could suggest that whereas the totality of Scripture is inspired, the individual expressions, words, and details are left to the freedom of the writer. However, to reply, verbal inspiration by no means invariably connotes dictation, or the reduction of the writer to acting simply as a scribe. Indeed, quite the contrary, it only means that in the free

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46 Greek: spermasin.
47 Greek: spermati.
choice by the writer of every word and construct the Holy Spirit totally superintends. As we have observed, Paul speaks of his words as "taught by the Holy Spirit"—therefore, not dictated. To Paul’s statement we might also quote again the words of Peter that "men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (II Peter 1:20). The “moving” of the Holy Spirit always includes human freedom, and this applies to the free exercise of human faculties in every word set down as Scripture. Hence whereas some portions of Scripture may have been dictated by God, verbal inspiration itself in no sense means dictation.

Second, are the words of Satan inspired? This question—sometimes assumed to lay to rest any idea of verbal inspiration—may be answered quite simply: Yes, in that he truly spoke them, not that they were spoken truly. Hence, when Satan is recorded as saying to Jesus: "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread" (Luke 4:3), we may be sure, despite the words being totally contrary to God’s intention, that Satan actually spoke the words. This is the meaning of verbal inspiration: not that everything written is divine truth or positive direction for a godly walk, but that the words are there by God’s purpose and the Spirit’s superintendence. Furthermore, they belong to the totality of what God would have us know. Thus—we may conclude—the words of Satan are verbally inspired.

Third, how can one speak of verbal inspiration when words given in quotations and accounts often show variance? In the matter of quotations from the Old Testament in the New there is often a difference in wording. For example, Romans 9:33 begins: "As it is written, ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make men stumble.’" This is undoubtedly a quotation from Isaiah 28:16 that begins: "Therefore thus says the LORD God, ‘Behold I am laying in Zion a foundation a stone, a tested stone.’" It is obvious

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48 Greek: έγώ εἰμι.
49 "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (II Cor. 3:17).
50 William Shedd, in speaking of verbal inspiration, puts it well: “This is wholly different from dictation. Dictation separates thought and language; verbal inspiration unites them” (Dogmatic Theology [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980 reprint], Vol. I, p. 90.).
51 As earlier noted.
52 We have already noted illustrations from Ecclesiastes and Job that portray inadequate, even faulty, understandings of God’s way and truth.
53 Satan’s words, however misleading they are (one might also recall Genesis 3:1—"Did God say…?"); by being included in Scripture are a continuing warning against his wiles. Hence, they belong in God’s written word for our ultimate good.
that Paul does not quote exactly from the Old Testament. We may also note similar words in I Peter 2:6 that likewise vary: "For it stands in scripture: ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious.’" Neither Paul nor Peter quotes verbally from Isaiah; does this not discount any idea of verbal inspiration? We may reply in twofold manner. First, the Holy Spirit is not bound to express Himself the same way on every occasion. Even as “as it is written” (referring to Old Testament) may come off differently in the New Testament, depending on God's intention. Second, again the diversity of human instruments (Isaiah, Paul, Peter) and the rather free way New Testament writers often quote the Old Testament can make for some variation. In sum, variation and diversity in quotations by no means is contrary to verbal inspiration; it only demonstrates an important point, namely, the non-rigid, dynamic character of biblical inspiration.  

There is also frequently a variation in accounts that refer to the same situation or event. In the Old Testament, parallel accounts in Kings and Chronicles often differ considerably; in the New Testament, the same is frequently true in the Gospels. One illustration, among a great many that could be mentioned, is that the words of Simon Peter in reply to Jesus’ question about His own identity. They are recorded in Mark 8:29 as “you are the Christ,” in Luke 9:20 as “The Christ of God,” in Matthew 16:16 as “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” It is apparent that Peter could not have said all these. Possibly it was the Matthean version, reduced in Mark and Luke, or it may have been the Markan account expanded in Luke and Matthew, or something else. In any event, can one still affirm verbal inspiration when the words differ considerably? The answer is not too dissimilar to what has just been said about biblical quotations, namely, that there is both the freedom of the Spirit and that of the individual writers: variation is to be expected. However, in this instance the matter may seem more difficult than that of a variation in quotation because these are reports of what Peter said to Jesus; he could not have said all three. We reply thus: Exactly what Peter said is not the issue in relation to verbal inspiration, but that all the accounts, in their diversity, are God’s written word. Each

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54 This is true in many other places in the New Testament.
55 It also shows how inadequate is any view of verbal dictation.
56 Perhaps this statement seems to contradict what was earlier said about Satan’s words to Jesus. The comment was made that verbal inspiration refers to the fact that Satan truly spoke the words, not that they were God’s truth. But here I am stating that exactly what Peter said is not the issue. There is no contradiction, however, for it is the case that exactly what Satan said was, and is not, the issue. Indeed, in
conveys the truth of God, and even gives additional insight into the mystery of Jesus’ identity; e.g., to be “the Christ” is to be God’s Messiah, hence “the Christ of God,” and to be God’s Son, hence “the Son of the living God.”

We conclude this section on the inspiration of Scripture by once more affirming that Scripture both in the whole and in each part is the written word of God: hence the plenary and verbal inspiration of Scripture. It should be added that this affirmation about Scripture makes of biblical study an exciting challenge. The study of every word, the consideration of variant readings, the most minute exegesis, all become a thrilling pursuit, for we know that every gain draws us that much closer to the very mind of God. And as we increasingly plant our feet upon the written word of God in all its breadth and depth, the Holy Spirit will lead us into greater and greater knowledge of the truth.

The parallel account in Matthew the recorded words of Satan are, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread” (4:3). In Luke’s account, as before quoted, it is “this stone” rather than “these stones.” So the fact that Satan spoke the words (in whichever slight variation) continues to be the important fact.

There are many other accounts in the Gospels where Jesus’ own words in the same situation differ from Gospel to Gospel. By no means can it be said, as above, that they necessarily express additional important insights. In many cases it may be simply that the Holy Spirit utilizes whatever expression the writer chooses (especially in quite minor variations or terminology). However, the variation, even seemingly minor, may serve some important purpose, such as to give some additional understanding. Thus—in terms of exegesis—it is important to handle the text as given in each case with extreme care and consideration.
Chapter 6
The Character of the Inspired Text

The character of the Scriptures is now to be considered. We shall observe, in turn, that the Scriptures are unalterable, infallible, and completely trustworthy.

A. Unalterable

Since the Scriptures are God’s written word, they are in no way to be altered or changed. The Psalmist speaks of how God’s word is “firmly fixed in the heavens” (Psalm 119:89); it is no less firmly fixed in writing on earth. The Scriptures, for all their great extent and variety, make up a complex composite that must remain intact through all generations.

One of the most striking verses attesting this unalterability is found in John 10:35—“scripture cannot be broken.” These words are spoken by Jesus to His adversaries after quoting a text from Psalms 82:6—“I say, You are gods.” Jesus argues from this text to His own statement about being the Son of God, but only does so by asserting that Scripture cannot be broken (annulled, set aside\(^5\)). It is worth observing that this strong statement about the irrefragability of Scripture is actually made of a seemingly rather insignificant and even marginal text. If that text cannot be broken, i.e., annulled or set aside, then, \(a\) fortiori, how much more the Scripture!

In this same vein Jesus, early in His ministry, regarding the law and the prophets, says: “I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17). Jesus has no intention of setting aside anything in law or prophet. Indeed, to make it all the stronger He adds: “For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot,\(^6\) will pass from the law until all is accomplished.” In other words, the law—representing

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\(^5\) “Set aside” is the NEB translation. The Greek word is \(luthenai\).

\(^6\) “Iota” is “the Greek equivalent of the Aramaic \(yod\), which in the original form of the saying represented the smallest letter of the alphabet” (Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1979]). The word translated as “dot,” \(keraia\), is literally “hook,” the little projection which distinguishes some Hebrew letters from those otherwise similar.
all of Scripture\textsuperscript{61}—is absolutely unalterable. To be sure (as we have before discussed), law and prophets are not “fulfilled,” that is brought to completion, until Jesus proclaims His message. Only then is the inner meaning fully set forth, and the higher righteousness exhibited. But what is declared, in the Old Testament, is nonetheless the unalterable word of God.\textsuperscript{62}

One further representation of the unalterability of Scripture is found in some of the closing words of the book of Revelation: “I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city” (22:18-19). The warning could hardly be more vigorously put, or the unalterability of even a single word more clearly asserted.

All of this has its quite significant effect upon the one who would truly hear the message of Scripture. Nothing in Scripture is dispensable: everything has some place and purpose as God’s written word. Hence, since there is ruled out any need to decide which Scripture “belongs” and which does not (as unfortunately some seek to determine), the believer—whether relatively untutored in biblical matters or the most scholarly exegete and expositor—can rejoice to place himself under total direction of holy Scripture.

\textsuperscript{61} In the previously noted conversation with His adversaries about “gods,” where Jesus quoted from the Psalms, He asks: “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, You are gods.’” The word “law” apparently includes the Psalms, and, by extension, all of the Old Testament. Incidentally, Paul does not hesitate to assign passages from the Psalms and Isaiah to the Law (see Romans 3:19 for the former, I Corinthians 14:21 for the latter).

\textsuperscript{62} This does not mean that Old Testament statutes and ordinances that related to the peculiar circumstances of Israel are necessarily still in effect. Many of the judicial and ceremonial requirements were temporary, and ceased with the New Testament dispensation. For example, over against the many Old Testament stipulations concerning clean and unclean foods, Jesus (according to Mark 7:19) “declared all foods clean.” Nonetheless—and in relation to our point concerning unalterability—\textit{at the time} when they were given the requirements were binding, not to be broken, hence the unalterable word of God. This, again, is a case of progressive revelation and—we should add—of the fulfillment Christ has brought about.
B. Infallible

Since the Scriptures are God’s written word, they are unerring in what they declare. The word “infallible” expresses both incapability of erring as well as the fact of inerrancy. The Scriptures are the infallible word of God.

1. Grounds

Let us observe several grounds for this affirmation of infallibility. Infallibility, first, is implicit within the total biblical witness. There is no statement in the Bible that directly declares inerrancy; however, it is implied throughout: “all Scripture” as “God-breathed,” “Scripture” and “God” sometimes used interchangeably, Scripture inspired to is every “iota” and “dot,” Scripture as impossible to “break” or annul—on and on. Everywhere there is the implication that Scripture is infallible, inerrant, indefinite. The infallibility of Scripture, second, is grounded in the attitude of Christ and the apostles regarding Scripture. We have noted some of the statements of Christ and His apostles (Peter, Paul, John) about Scripture: it is apparent that their attitude was one of unhesitating and unwavering trust. They never call in question, challenge, or dispute any Scripture; they quote, or make various uses of Scripture, with the unquestioning certitude that whatever is contained therein is the truth of God. It is impossible to think, even for a moment, of Christ or the apostles as viewing Scripture any other way than infallible. Christ once said, “Ye do err,” but not of Scripture, rather of people “not knowing the Scripture” (Matthew 22:29 KJV). The Scriptures are an unerring guide to erring people. Truly our Lord’s whole attitude—and His apostles’—was that the Scriptures are the infallible word of God.

63 We are referring to the Scriptures as originally written. Some copyist errors in transmission have occurred, as is shown by comparing extant O.T. and N.T. manuscripts (no originals remain). However, that deviations from the original text are quite minor is shown by their relative fewness. We may rest assured that God’s inerrant word stands behind the slight variations in the several manuscripts.

64 In the “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy” (drafted October, 1978, by a number of evangelicals) a distinction is made between infallibility and inerrancy, infallibility referring to Scripture being “true and reliable in all the matters it addresses,” inerrancy to “being free from all falsehood, fraud, and deceit” (Articles XI and XII). However, it is also asserted that infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated” (Article XI). The distinction is so slight that we shall use the two terms interchangeably. (For a copy of the complete statement, write The Coalition on Revival, Box A, Sunnyvale, CA 94087.)

65 The opening article in the Regent University “Philosophy of Education” affirms “that the Holy Bible is the inspired, infallible and authoritative source of Christian doctrine and precept.”

66 The word “indefectible” while less common than “infallible” or “inerrant” has a specific value in combining the idea of permanence (not subject to failure or decay) and flawlessness (free of every fault or
The attitude of Christ and the apostles to Scriptures surely must have critical bearing on any Christian attitude. If they held without the slightest hesitation to the total integrity, indeed the infallibility, of Scripture, this would seem to call for a like attitude on the part of all who are their true followers. It is difficult to imagine a proper Christian response to be: “Well, they may have thought so, but I beg to differ.” Whether this is said from a presumably more enlightened viewpoint (twentieth century over the first) or a more informed viewpoint (“critical” understanding of the Bible over a “naïve” one), it places a Christian in the strange and uncomfortable position, at least at this point, of moving away from the original Founder and witnesses of faith. Even worse—it must be added—if Christ and the apostles are mistaken in their view of Scripture, how can we be sure of their view or teaching about anything else? Maybe Jesus’ attitude toward God as His Father, or the apostles’ attitude about Jesus as a Savior, was likewise off base. One does not need to add more: the whole edifice of Christian faith comes near to toppling down. In other words, to put it bluntly, if Christ and the apostles cannot be trusted about Scripture, can they really be trusted in other matters?

Third, it is significant to observe that the historic church tradition through the centuries has held the Scriptures to be God’s infallible word. The early church Fathers affirmed such; for example, Irenaeus claimed that “the Scriptures are perfect, seeing that they are spoken by God’s Word and his Spirit,” and Augustine wrote concerning the Scriptures of his conviction that “no one of the authors has erred in anything, in writing.” Such total acceptance of Scripture implicitly undergirds all the great creeds and confessions, and becomes explicit in later Protestant and Roman Catholic formularies. For example, the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) speaks of “the entire perfection” of Scripture, and Vatican Council I (1870) affirms that Scriptures “contain revelation with no admixture of error...because, having been written by the inspiration of...error). It is the latter meaning, of course, that more specifically relates to the subject at hand. The Scripture is “without defect,” i.e., indefectible. See Psalm 12:6—“the words of the LORD are flawless” (NIV).

67 Against Heresies, ii. 28.  
68 Ep. ad Hier. Ixxxii. 3.  
69 Chap. 1, Sect. 5. Also after listing the 66 books of the Bible, the Westminster Confession says: “All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life” (Chap. I, Sect. 2).
the Holy Ghost, they have God for their author.” \(^{70}\) The infallibility of God’s written word has been generally affirmed through the centuries by the great church traditions.

2. Form

It is important, next, to state the form of infallibility is to be observed from the phenomena of Scripture. In speaking of Scripture as being infallible or inerrant, we need to see how this works out in the actual composition of the Bible. A mistake sometimes made is that of seeing error where a proper understanding of the form of Scripture would rectify this judgment. Let me note a few things.

First, there is freedom in Scripture in the matter of quotation. If a New Testament writer quotes the Old Testament with variation from the original text, such is no error. The Holy Spirit is not bound to a prior utterance, and may wish to bring out something other, perhaps new, in additional revelation.

Second, there is often a diversity of historical and geographical data within the Scriptures. There are frequently divergences between various Old Testament historical books (for example, between Kings and Chronicles) and likewise among the four Gospels in the time, place, and sequence of events. Such divergences are no denial of inerrancy. Rather do they represent the diversity of God’s intention and expression as well as the situation of the writers.

Third, there are occasional irregularities of grammar and spelling. The Holy Spirit takes what he finds, and makes use of various human instruments. He does not change uneducated men into educated (except in the ways of the Lord!); thus the Scriptures may and do vary in literary character and quality. So, when the human form is properly recognized, there is no denial of infallibility.

Fourth, there are instances in Scripture of non-exact, even hyperbolic language. For example, the statement that “Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea” (I

\(^{70}\) Vatican Council I, Chap. II, “Of Revelation.” It is further significant to note that Pope Leo XIII in his Encyclical of 1893 vigorously states: “It is absolutely wrong and forbidden either to narrow inspiration to parts of Holy Scripture or to admit that the sacred writer has erred” (see Modern Catholicism by Walther Loewenich (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1959), p. 125. Vatican Council II (1963-65) also declares that “the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error” divine truth (Vatican II, Chap. III, Sect. 11, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation”). Unfortunately as we have previously noted, the Roman Catholic Church elevates tradition to a place of equality with Scripture. Nonetheless, our point here is that in regard to Scripture, Roman Catholicism is at one with historic Protestantism.
Kings 4:20), while not literally true, expresses, in hyperbole, their rapid growth and God’s blessing upon them. It would be naive to say that the writer of Kings erred because the Israelites were not “as many as the sand”!

Fifth, and in a similar vein, biblical writers are often less concerned about precision in detail than might be expected. For example, a name in a genealogy may represent more than one person, an event may be reported in various accounts with differing participants, and the words spoken in a given situation may be reported differently in parallel narratives. All such variations rather than denying inerrancy represent the freedom in which the Scriptures are set forth.

Sixth, Scriptures are written in popular, non-technical language. We are therefore not to expect precise, scientific terminology. The forms of expression inevitably belong to the time and culture of the writers of a given portion of Scripture, and will be colored thereby. This does not mean error, for within differing forms of expression the truth is resident. Also it is to be recognized that scientific truth may be set forth in other than scientific form, and be none the less factual.

Seventh, Scriptures must always be read with the given or implied purpose in mind. If this is not done, error may be supposed where there is none. For example, the Gospel of Luke is declared to be written for the purpose of setting forth “an orderly account” (1:3) of events; the Gospel of John is said to be written “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name” (20:31). Hence we should not expect quite the same concern for historical sequence in John as in Luke. Thus John may have some different ordering of events. Accordingly, Scripture is not to be adjudged as in error if there is diversity here. To repeat: the given or implied purpose must be kept in mind when speaking of the inerrancy of Scripture.

It is apparent from the preceding paragraphs that the form inerrancy takes is not to be presupposed, but to be recognized from the way Scripture was actually written. Alien

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71 This, e.g., is the case in the opening chapter of Genesis where though much of the language reflects an ancient era, the truth remains intact and may be apprehended as a guide for our own time. See my Renewal Theology, Vol. 1, Chap. 5, on “Creation.”
72 This may also include historical data: “Scientific and historical facts can be presented in popular, figurative and symbolic form—and still be just as factual as a more literal account” (Davis Dictionary of the Bible, p. 141). This comment relates specifically to the words in Scripture about the grain of mustard seed.
approaches to the Bible will bring other, and possibly negative, results.\textsuperscript{73} However, when there is proper understanding of the biblical phenomena, the infallibility of Scripture is all the more fully grounded.

It is of no small significance also to observe that with the passage of the years so-called discrepancies in Scripture are increasingly being resolved.\textsuperscript{74} It is, further, quite significant that with the advance of historical and archeological studies, the credibility of Scripture rather than being undermined is being more confirmed.\textsuperscript{75} There are, to be sure, many problem areas remaining, but the contemporary trend is toward the recognition of Scriptural integrity.

**C. Completely Trustworthy**

Since the Scriptures are God’s written word, they are completely trustworthy. All that has been said about the Scriptures as unalterable and infallible leads to the further affirmation of their total trustworthiness. We may be fully assured that in every portion of Scripture God’s word is being expressed.

There can be no question, therefore, as to whether the Scriptures are true; the only real issue is whether we are properly using them. Shortly before Paul writes the words to Timothy about all of Scripture being “God-breathed,” he says to him: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15). With the full assurance that the Scriptures are totally trustworthy we may give ourselves to the task and challenge of their “right handling.”

To say that the Scriptures are trustworthy does not mean that they are the object of our trust. Our trust is in the Lord—in a personal relation to Him. The Scriptures cannot

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\textsuperscript{73} In “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy” there are the significant words: “We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage and purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selection of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations” (Article XIII).

\textsuperscript{74} See, e.g., An Examination of the Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, J. W. Haley (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977).

\textsuperscript{75} Nelson Glueck, noted archeologist, writes: “It can be stated categorically that no archeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference” (Rivers in the Desert: A History of the Negev [New York:}
take the place of Him who is Author of Scripture. However, since He has given us His word in writing, we can have full confidence in its trustworthiness.

The total trustworthiness of Scripture is a fact in which we may greatly rejoice.

Grove Press, 1960], p. 31). Historical references in the Bible are likewise being more and more substantiated.
Chapter 7
Understanding Scripture

Let us conclude with a consideration of how we are better to understand Scripture. All that has been said thus far is of little avail if comprehension of Scripture is lacking or limited. Accordingly, we shall now set forth a number of factors that contribute to better understanding.

A. Knowledge of God

Since Scripture is God’s written word, we must know the Author if we are to know His word. One may gain some knowledge of the Bible by reading it as an historical and literary document, but for genuine comprehension there is the necessity of being attuned to His voice and message. The Bible is history—His story—the story of God in His relation to the world and man and can only be understood from that perspective. The Bible is a literary document. It may be read as great literature, but the literary form in every instance is subordinate to the message God speaks through it. It is only as we know the God of the Bible that we can truly hear His word.

This further means—and let us put it bluntly—that we need to be “born anew” (John 3:3) for this to happen. Jesus in talking with Nicodemus, a leading Pharisee, about this matter said to him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet do not understand this?” (John 3:10). As a teacher of Israel Nicodemus presumed to know the Old Testament Scriptures thoroughly, but he did not understand about spiritual rebirth; and not having experienced that rebirth he was lacking in true understanding. One must be “born anew” or “born of God” (John 1:13) to understand the things of God. Those “born of God” through Jesus Christ, accordingly, are children of God and can hear the Father’s voice.

But this also calls for living close to God. One who spends much time communicating with God in prayer, one who daily seeks God’s cleansing and forgiveness, and one who endeavors to walk in humble and loving obedience—such a person by becoming more like God is increasingly able to understand God in His written word.
There can be no substitute for the knowledge of God in apprehending the truth of the Bible.

B. The Whole of Scripture

We need, next, to gain an increasing comprehension of the totality of Scripture to understand its meaning. Since “all Scripture” is “God-breathed,” it is important to gain as comprehensive an understanding as possible to apprehend the full truth of God. It is significant that Paul, just before writing to Timothy about this total inspiration of Scripture, speaks of how “from childhood you have known the sacred writings” (II Timothy 3:15, NASB), hence not just a part of them but all of them. Knowledge of the totality of Scripture is essential to understanding both the whole and the part.

Since the Bible is a panorama of God’s work from the initial creation to the final consummation, the reader must be aware of the total picture as he reads any one portion of it. The question often will be: How does this passage fit in with God’s overall purpose and plan? For example, the New Testament itself is the New Covenant (Covenant = Testament), and Jesus speaks about “the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20). How does this relate to the Old Testament, i.e., the Old Covenant? Only by an understanding of both is God’s truth adequately discerned.

An increasing knowledge of the whole of Scripture makes for balanced understanding. If one spends most of his time reading only a certain portion, for example, the Gospels, he will be getting only a limited understanding. The Gospels without the Epistles to interpret them are incomplete, the Epistles without the Gospels lack substance: both without the Old Testament are incomprehensible. Frequently people get off on tangents because they regularly read only those parts of Scripture that interest or please them. Paul speaks of how he had declared to the elders at Ephesus “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:28) so that they might better lead the congregation. It is the “whole counsel” in the totality of Scripture that brings about mature and balanced understanding.

One of the surest principles of biblical understanding is that Scripture interprets Scripture.76 If some passage read is not clear in itself, often the most helpful procedure is

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76 The Westminster Confession of Faith puts it thus: “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which
to turn to other similar passages that may cast light on the one being considered. Such procedure obviously calls for a wide knowledge of Scripture, for the more comprehensive is one’s knowledge the more able he will be to apply it to a given passage.

We cannot urge too strongly the importance of studying the whole of God’s written word. This calls for consistent day by day reading of selected portions of the Bible and pondering each Scripture verse carefully. For many persons it is valuable to read through the Bible each year, so that as time goes on there is a growing sense of being immersed in the totality of God’s word. In so doing it is important to read from the New Testament regularly, since Christians are primarily people of the New Covenant. A good reading guide will often suggest daily readings from both Testaments and possibly a plan for completing the whole Bible in a year.

It is helpful to read the Bible in various translations. Any knowledge of Hebrew and Greek is of course valuable, since they are the original languages. Most readers will need to make use of biblical translations. The King James Version of A.D. 1611 continues to be useful; however, there is need for supplementation by more recent translations, for example, the Revised Standard Version (RSV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the New International Version (NIV). The Living Bible is a good paraphrase that often provides additional insights. It is important to make use of more than one translation so as to gain as much perception as possible of the original text of Scripture.

The more we know the whole of God’s written word, the better equipped we will be for all of life. To refer to Paul’s words once again about “all Scripture” being “God-breathed,” it is to be recalled that he adds: “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.” The whole of Scripture, as read and understood, makes for the complete equipment that the Christian needs.

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77 The King James translation of 1611 is also known as "the Authorized Version," since it was authorized by England's ruling monarch at that time, and replaced other preceding translations. "Authorized" should not be understood to mean the approved version for our day.

78 Or the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).
C. Diversity in Scripture

In order to understand Scripture properly it is important to recognize its rich variety. God’s written word is by no means a monolithic statement of some kind but through human instruments comes in many and diverse ways. Scripture contains history and prophecy, poetry and wise sayings, parable and allegory—to mention some of the variety—and through all such means God declares His word and truth. Since this is the case, if the reader is to understand what the Scripture is saying he must read with appreciation of this wide diversity.

Further, there is the related matter of literal and figurative expressions in the Bible. For example, in Isaiah 55 there is the declaration by God through the prophet that “as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (verse 9). There is also the statement that “the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands” (verse 12). The first declaration is obviously to be understood quite literally: God’s ways and thoughts are higher than ours. The latter has to be understood figuratively: mountains and hills do not literally sing nor do trees clap their hands. Both are true statements (the figurative is not less factual than the literal), but must be understood in terms of the kind of language used, or there will be confusion and misunderstanding. It is by no means always easy to know what is literal and what is figurative in a given passage or book. But there must be the recognition of such differences in many places if one is to arrive at right understanding.

There is also much diversity in the historical and cultural background of the human writers of Scripture. The more that can be learned about such matters as historical setting, customs of the time, and the writer’s own situation, the better prepared one is to appreciate what the Scripture contains. To be sure, God’s word is by no means simply a product of history and culture—it infinitely transcends all things human; however, since God’s word is spoken in and through the total human context, it may be better heard when something of that background and context is known. A good study Bible with dictionary, commentary, maps, and other relevant information can often prove quite helpful.

79 The Living Bible is available in a special edition as The Book.
Recognition of the rich diversity in Scripture can be another step ahead in understanding God's written word.

D. Illumination of the Holy Spirit

For the true and proper understanding of Scripture the illumination of the Holy Spirit is essential. Since the Scriptures—all of them—are “God-breathed,” “God-Spirited,”80 they were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Each passage and word is an emanation of the divine breath, the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the same Holy Spirit must illumine the reader if he is to have genuine understanding.

This means, first of all, that a person needs to be spiritually perceptive. Paul writes (as we earlier noted): “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God” (I Corinthians 2:12 NASB). The “things freely given” of which Paul speaks refers to his teaching by the Spirit (2:13). Then Paul adds: “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised [or ‘discerned’]” (2:14 NASB). The natural man, “the man without the Spirit”81 (NIV), cannot possibly—no matter how excellent a student of Scripture he may be—discern “the things of the Spirit.” Unless one is “born of the Spirit,”82 there can be no illumination by the Spirit, hence utterly no apprehension of the truths of God.

We cannot emphasize this point too strongly. The most accurate factual knowledge attained through language study, detailed analysis, repeated reading, and so on, can give information, to be sure, but unless the person himself is changed, he cannot begin to understand. There can be no illumination of the Spirit to a mind and heart still darkened by sin. Paul writes elsewhere: “Put off your old nature...and be renewed in the spirit of your minds” (Ephesians 4:22-23). Unless such renewal has occurred, the study of Scripture cannot lead to spiritual understanding.

Second, it is important to add that the more a person has matured spiritually—the Holy Spirit doing an increasing work of sanctification—the more he will be able to

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80 Recall fn. 23.
81 The word is psuchikos: i.e., natural man, not yet touched by the Spirit of God.
apprehend Scriptural truth. As Paul begins to discuss some deeply spiritual matters, he says to the Corinthians that “among the mature we do impart wisdom” (I Corinthians 2:6). However, says Paul later to the Corinthians, “I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but a men of the flesh [‘carnal’ –KJV], as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food” (I Corinthians 3:1-2). If persons are still “babes in Christ,” there is no way to appropriate the deeper things of God as set forth in His written word. But to the mature, the Holy Spirit will increasingly illuminate the truths of God.

Our primary concern, therefore, in seeking to understand Scripture is to be the kind of person who can receive this spiritual illumination. A Christian who is still largely a “man of the flesh” (a “carnal” Christian) can only go so far. Though such a one is no longer a “natural man,” and therefore has some spiritual perception, he cannot really get into “solid food,” the meatier stuff of Scripture. Progress in the word can only occur through spiritual maturation.

Consequently, if we are seeking day by day to grow in holiness, and thereby maturing, we can approach God’s written word with a mind and heart that is far more ready. We will still need to pray for God’s cleansing of our minds and hearts, since there are invariably some blocks in the way. But when such a prayer has been very specifically and concretely offered, we are then ready to pray for the Holy Spirit to illuminate the words to be read. A brief prayer might simply be: “Come, Holy Spirit, Inspirer of these words, and illuminate my mind and spirit so that I may truly understand.”

It is amazing what God will reveal in His word to those who are prepared to receive. Jesus promised that when the Holy Spirit comes, “He will teach you all things” (John 14:26). Even so the Holy Spirit through God’s word will lead into all truth.

E. The Help of Other Christians

Finally, in order to understand Scripture adequately we need the help that can come from other Christians. From the earliest days of the church, believers were strengthened in their faith by the teaching of fellow Christians. The first thing said about the believers

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82 Recall our prior discussion of this rebirth.
83 Referring to the “secret and hidden wisdom of God…decreed before the ages for our glorification” (I Cor. 2:7).
on the day of Pentecost was that “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42). To be sure, these believers had received the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, but they needed the teaching of the apostles to give them fuller understanding.

One of the ministries that Christ has given to certain persons in the church is the ministry of teaching: “his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11). The teachers, along with other gifted ministries, function “for the equipment of the saints...until we all attain to the unity of the faith...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (verses 12-14). We do have the essential teaching of the apostles in the Scriptures, but we need others who, building on that teaching, give further help in understanding. Without such teaching, people often get carried away into grievous error.

Faithful attendance at church to receive anointed preaching and teaching, study of God’s word together in Sunday School and home fellowships, the reading of good Bible commentaries: these are just some of the ways whereby we may be helped in the study of God’s written word. Though the Holy Spirit often does illuminate the word for a believer in his own reading and prayer, the Spirit may—and often does—use the teaching of others to provide insight and understanding.

A brief word of admonition: we must guard against false teachers. It is quite significant that shortly after Paul says to Timothy that “all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful [or ‘profitable’] for teaching” (II Timothy 3:16), he adds: “The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths” (4:3-4). Unfortunately, it is the case today that many Christians are turning aside from sound teaching and listening to whatever suits their fancy or gives them a sense of being the only true believers. We must guard against any and every tendency to listen to such seductive teaching.

But now having spoken this warning, it remains a fact that all of us need the help of others in understanding God’s holy word. The Holy Spirit is not simply given to the

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85 Or their ego, e.g., the Gospel as the way to success and prosperity.
86 Many religious sects make an exclusive claim on truth.
individual so that he may understand, but the Spirit is also given to the community of Christians and to certain persons in it who are especially anointed as teachers. Hence we need one another. God may illuminate a passage of Scripture through another brother or sister as we meet together, or He may speak through one who is gifted to be a teacher. In whatever way truth comes through others we may indeed be grateful.

We close on a note of thanksgiving that God has seen fit to give us His word in writing. Surely Jesus Christ will always have primacy, for He is the Word who became flesh; but the beauty of the words of Scripture is that they are a continuing witness to Him. Moreover, until Christ shall return, the Scriptures are God’s tangible utterances that through the Holy Spirit will lead us in the way everlasting.

Thanks be unto God for His holy word!

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87 We quote again, finally, the words of Jesus Himself about the Scriptures: “It is they that bear witness to me” (John 5:39).