

The Ultimate Capitulation – Inspiration of Scripture

Dub McClish

Introduction

One can hardly imagine any subject in religion but that men have capitulated the Biblical teaching on it. The mere mention of the inspiration of the Bible, the authority of Scripture, baptism, the church, repentance, worship, the Lord's supper, the virgin birth, the Deity of Christ, the resurrection of the Lord, Heaven, Hell, and many other subjects reminds us that men have utterly abandoned the Scriptures concerning them.

However, the consequences of abandoning some doctrines are greater than those of abandoning others. For example, one may devoutly believe in all of the above-listed doctrines of Scripture except that New Testament worship does not include the use of mechanical instruments. While this is by no means a minor issue and worshiping with an instrument is a sin that will cause one to be lost, if one is genuine in his belief in the authority of the Bible, he may be taught out of his error.

On the other hand, no subject is more significant and far-reaching than the subject of the inspiration of the Bible. Rejection of the **inspiration** of the Bible equals rejection of the Bible itself because it claims to be peculiarly and uniquely revealed, inspired, and given of God. Therefore, rejection of the Bible is tantamount to rejection of God and His Son, even as it is also a rejection of the one true religion. If one surrenders the conviction that the Bible is inspired – as it defines and describes *inspiration* itself – then he divorces himself from any accountability to its authority and its doctrine. Can one envision the folly of trying to convince an infidel that the use of instrumental music in New Testament worship (or any other erroneous doctrine or practice) is wrong by appealing to the Bible – a book that he denies is from God? One who denies the taproot of Divine inspiration as the Bible's source can only conceive of it as a dead, fruitless tree. To the skeptic the Bible is only a historical curiosity piece at best.

The Bible's Claims of Inspiration

The Bible's claims about itself involve three important words: *inspiration*, *plenary*, and *verbal*. One does not read much of the Bible before he comes to understand that it claims for itself the very concepts of origin and quality embodied in these three words.

Ironically, while the **concept** appears consistently throughout the Bible, the **word** *inspiration* is found only twice in the KJV Bible (Job 32:8; 2 Tim. 3:16). Job 32:8 reads, "But there

is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." Most are more familiar with 2 Timothy 3:16: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (KJV). The Greek word behind *inspiration* in this verse is the compound word, *theopneustos*, meaning God-breathed or breathed out by God. From this passage the doctrine of the origin of the Bible is named "the doctrine of inspiration." The Bible teaches that God is its source.

Plenary is derived from a Latin word that means "full." Plenary inspiration means that the Scriptures are inspired throughout—in every part, fully, completely, including every kind of subject matter (historical, geographical, scientific, ethical, "religious," etc.) found in them. Note that Paul declared that "**all** scripture is given by inspiration of God," not just the parts relating to morals or salvation or some other topic one might subjectively choose. This doctrine implies that there are no contradictions in the Bible, since God gave it and He is "not a God of confusion" (1 Cor. 14:33). This claim means, in fact, that God's guidance of the inspired men extended to the minutest parts, even to the very words they wrote in the original books, as seen below.

Verbal obviously refers to words. The Lord unmistakably taught the verbal inspiration of Scripture in His immortal prayer: "For the **words** which thou gavest me I have given unto them [the apostles]; and they received them, and knew of a truth that I came forth from thee, and they believed that thou didst send me" (John 17:8, Emph. DM). Paul spoke for all of the inspired writers when he wrote that God revealed His will to them, enabling them to "speak, not in **words** which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth" (1 Cor. 2:10, 13, Emph. DM). To say that the Scriptures are verbally inspired is to say that the words themselves, as they were originally written, are the words God chose and directed the Bible writers to set down. In effect, to contend for verbal inspiration implies plenary inspiration and vice versa. Because of the concepts embodied in these three words, the Bible stands alone as inerrant.

Historical Notes on the Doctrine

The rejection of plenary/verbal inspiration has been relatively recent, as documented by Benjamin B. Warfield (*The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*), R. Laird Harris (*Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*), and others. From the church's beginning until the eighteenth century those who believed in God believed in the inspiration of the Bible in the fullest sense.

Some began to seriously criticize and question the Bible in every respect in the middle part of the eighteenth century. However, Biblical Criticism (later to be named "destructive

higher criticism”) did not become widespread until about a century later through the influence of the likes of F. C. Baur, Karl H. Graf, and Julius Wellhausen. These and others began calling in question almost every previously accepted assurance concerning every part of the Bible as to textual purity, authorship, dating, historicity, and authenticity. The most radical critics gave up even a pretense of belief in inspiration in any degree.

While not all of the theologians went that far, the destructive critics most certainly had a telling effect. By the close of the nineteenth century much of the theological scholarship (as the world views it) and the major theological schools had been captured by the liberal tenets of Biblical criticism, which began churning out a steady stream of infidel pulpiteers. The restoration preacher and scholar, J.W. McGarvey, wrote his monumental (and still-valuable) *Biblical Criticism* to fight this theological scourge. Theologians invented numerous false theories to nullify and circumvent the Bible doctrine of plenary and verbal inspiration. Presently, few preachers in the major denominations have any Biblical concept of inspiration and would condescendingly sneer at anyone who does.

What about Us?

Some within the church in the late nineteenth-century were infected with the modernism just described. They joined those who clamored for instrumental music and missionary societies in rending the body of Christ at the beginning of the twentieth century. The modernistic element of this tragic schism evolved into the ultra-liberal Disciples of Christ Christian Church, which would hoot at the very suggestion that the Bible is inspired.

Before the 1970s one can find a few isolated instances among us of sympathy for the Biblical critics and skeptics, but they were just that—isolated, and such were properly ostracized upon exposure. However, over the past quarter-century a new class of "advanced thinkers" has arisen—many of them associated with “our” undergraduate religion departments and graduate religion schools. Unfortunately, they have gained widespread acceptance and their numbers (and those of their disciples) are growing.

In 1973 a Herald of Truth television sermon delivered by Harold Hazelip contained the following agnostic assessment of the Bible:

We are assuming that it [the Bible] is the inspired word of God, though this certainly is also an area in which we should be open to whatever facts are pertinent. Any observer of religion is aware that our problem is a legitimate one.

As early as 1975 Leroy Garrett referred to "jars and conflicts" that were "abundant in scripture" and depicted the Bible as a book that was not "some sort of heavenly document that escapes man's imperfect handiwork." However, he assures us, "there are no errors or mistakes that really matter."

In 1979, John T. Willis, a teacher in the religion department of Abilene Christian University, wrote:

The Bible claims to be inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16). There is *no way to prove or disprove this claim* absolutely, although arguments have been advanced on both sides of the issue [emph. DM]."

In another swipe at inspiration, he declared in 1980 that "the Bible *contains* the word of God, but not ordinarily or absolutely as it is ordinarily read." Rubel Shelly delivered a series of lectures in 1990 in which he said the Sermon on the Mount was compiled from various "scraps." In the same series he averred that Luke got his information about the Lord from Mark, "Q" (an imaginary source modernists long ago dreamed up to sidestep the doctrine of inspiration), preaching he heard, and miscellaneous scraps of material he gathered, rather than from the Holy Spirit.

In 1992 Bill Love wrote *The Core Gospel*, in which he depicted the entire Bible as a collection of "stories." Carroll D. Osburn wrote a book titled, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, in 1993 in which he ridiculed the idea of verbal, plenary inspiration as "naïve" and "fundamentalism." He is amused that any would advance the notion that Truth in the Bible extends to scientific, historical, and geographical teachings as well as to morals and religion. Osburn is not only a "professor" in the religion department at Abilene Christian University, he is "Carmichael Distinguished Professor of New Testament."

Let it not be lost on the reader that several of these men are molding the convictions of unsuspecting Christian young people by the hundreds each year. By no means do I believe that these are the only ones in the religion departments of schools founded and operated by brethren who hold to destructive higher criticism. Further, there are numerous "sophisticated" congregations in which, if the preacher preached a strong sermon advocating the plenary/verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, he would either be laughed out of the pulpit or figuratively "tarred and feathered," if not both in that order! There are many who have not yet capitulated, but who are willing to support and encourage, or at least refuse to oppose and expose them. They may as well deny inspiration themselves as to behave so irresponsibly. Thus,

we have seen and are seeing before our very eyes the “ultimate capitulation” in some who have been in the church.

The first step of the liberals in destroying the church was to continue their lip service to inspiration, all the while either ignoring or denying its authority if it limited their change agenda. The next great battle we face – and it is already upon us – involves a second crucial step: denial of the plenary, verbal inspiration of the Bible. The second step is but the natural byproduct of the first. Is the Bible the very Word of God, or is it the mere words of men? After all, if one is not going to respect its authority in all things, there is really little practical value in affirming or defending its inspiration claims.

Why do folk who have thus capitulated continue any pitiful travesty in religion, much less pretend to continue to be in the church of Christ? If the Bible is not God’s Word in the fullest sense of the term, we have no reliable source of information concerning the nature of God and about how to live in such a way as to please Him. Indeed, we cannot even know that He desires us to live in a certain way, nor that there are rewards and punishments awaiting all men, depending on whether or not we please Him. There is no undergirding, objective religious or moral authority if the Bible is not God's inspired Word. Without the Bible, all we are left with is the midnight darkness of humanism, paganism, and multi-cultural pluralism.

Thus, those who would rob men of their faith in the Bible as God's faithful, infallible, and inerrant Word rob them of everything of essential value! Therefore, surrender of the Bible’s inspiration is unquestionably **the ultimate capitulation**. I beg those who have thus capitulated to restudy the evidence and be converted. Failing this, I urge them to be honest enough to flee to the bogs and swamps of outright infidelity (toward which they are rapidly moving) and leave the rest of us alone!

[**Note:** I wrote this MS and it originally appeared as an “Editorial Perspective” in the January 2001 issue of *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL*, of which I was editor at the time.]

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