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# “DOCTRINE” OF SCRIPTURE

## 2. SPECIAL REVELATION

Special revelation is distinguished from general revelation in two ways: Scope and Substance. Special revelation is specialized in scope. So only some people at sometimes received special revelation. Whereas, everyone all of the time, from the moment there were human beings to witness creation, witness general revelation; it has been available to all people. All people have this a conscience, a moral sensibility built within. Romans 2 says the law is written on their hearts. General revelation is general in scope, and special revelation is special. When God appeared to Moses in the wilderness at the burning bush, how many people received that revelation? As it gets recorded for us in Scripture, we receive it second hand, but at that moment when God spoke to Moses, that is special revelation to one person at one point in history. It was revelation that hadn't been known before. It was given only to this one person. It is specialized revelation in scope and in substance. Moses asks, who shall I say sent me? God says, tell them I AM sent you (Ex 3). So here we have the revelation of God's name, Yahweh. You can't get that from looking at the starry heavens or beautiful scenery. This has to be told to us. Special revelation is special in substance, in the actual content of what it reveals.

### *A) AVENUES OF SPECIAL REVELATION*

#### 1) PERSONAL ENCOUNTER

This is a category of special revelation that some evangelicals are uncomfortable with, but it is an altogether viable legitimate biblical category. The reason some have felt uncomfortable with it is because people, like Barth and Brunner even more so, in the Neo-Orthodox tradition turned most of the revelation into this category. You have a personal encounter with God, and as you read the Bible then God works through the Bible to come to you in personal encounter. Some in the evangelical tradition have been very reluctant to talk about this category. Reading through the Bible you find repeated personal experiences recorded in Scripture for us. They really did happen and we need to understand this as one way God has chosen through the Scriptures to make himself known.

This personal encounter can include the kind of thing that happened with Moses, the voice heard, and a conversation takes place. Can you imagine talking with God in that way, where you ask God a question and he answers. Moses asks, what shall I tell them when they ask me who sent me? And God says, tell them such and such. That is incredible. Here you have this very real, direct conversation; it is revelation that takes place.

There is also a kind of personal encounter that we see all through the Bible in dreams and visions as well. Think of the dreams that Daniel received, or think of Joseph, the dreams that God gave to Joseph. Of visions, Paul talks about being caught up into the higher sphere and how he doesn't even know for sure where he was, or whether he was in a trance or not during this vision that he had. Think of the Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation and the visions that were given to John. Dreams and visions may also be avenues by which God makes himself known.

It is a whole other question whether those kinds of things may continue. I believe that God is free to do whatever God wants to do whenever God wants to do it. I don't think that we have clear ability to say, he no longer uses dreams or visions or that sort of thing. I do think that we must be careful though. We must be careful in being open to that kind of more direct revelation from God. It is up to him whether he does it or not. We don't want to in any way threaten the absolute authority of the Bible. We must careful not to overemphasis or make primary the notion of personal encounters, dreams, visions, God speaking words of. There is a tendency to think of the Bible as that old book over there where God spoke in the past, but what we want is to hear God speak now. Any personal experience cannot, in any way, jeopardize the absolute authority of Scripture, where alone God speaks inerrantly.

## 2) MIGHTY ACT

The distinction between a personal encounter and a mighty act is in a mighty act you may not hear God speak. God manifests himself through some kind of powerful demonstration. To cite an example, in a personal encounter, God tells Moses I will deliver the people; go back and tell them that I have heard their cry, and I have seen their affliction; I have come down, and I will deliver them. Remember that is the way Exodus 2 ends. Moses then goes back, they come out of Egypt after the plagues, and then God opens up the Red Sea. This is a mighty act.

How about when Hezekiah received the letter from Sennacherib that boasted of Assyria's prowess and its ability and how Sennacherib was going to come and wipe out Jerusalem. How does your God compare to all of the other gods we have destroyed, says Sennacherib? This was huge mistake. Sennacherib sends his soldiers and Hezekiah prays. Remember how he spreads the letter out before the Lord. He pleads with God, for your name's sake, oh God, show yourself to be God over the nations. In the night, an angel comes. Think of this, an angel, just one. How many of God's force do you need to destroy 185,000 soldiers? Just one. In that night 185,000 Assyrian soldiers are killed. In Jerusalem at the time, there were probably 20,000 to 30,000 people who lived there, at the most. They were no match for this army and the Assyrian were all dead. This is mighty act.

What about the empty tomb? Mighty act. You see God making himself known in demonstrations of his power throughout the Scriptures.

## 3) PROPOSITIONAL REVELATION

This category, just because of the name given to it, is sometimes misunderstood. What it simply means is revelation that comes in human language. It probably ought to be called "linguistic revelation" instead of propositional, but that is the term that is traditionally used. Propositional revelation is just revelation that comes in human language. When God speaks, this is propositional revelation. When Jesus speaks it is propositional revelation. When the prophets speak the word of the Lord, it is propositional revelation. When the apostles write under the inspiration, it is propositional revelation. Propositional revelation is larger than Scripture in the sense that all of Scripture is propositional revelation, but you can't reverse that statement; not all propositional revelation is Scripture. Do we have every word that Jesus spoke? No, we know we don't because John even told us so. *"There are many more things that he did and if we tried to write them all down, all the books in world could not contain them"* (Jn 21:25). Do we have every word that Jesus spoke? No. Then we don't have all the propositional revelation that he gave. Everything he spoke, he spoke as God in human form. In all of Scripture do we have everything that every prophet spoke to the people that God sent them to speak to? No, we have sort of summary records by inspiration that get their messages to the people that are recorded for us. But we don't have every word that was spoken. So, propositional revelation is larger than Scripture. It is revelation every time God, whether directly or through one of his agents, a prophet or Apostle, speaks or writes what is the Word of God. If it is the Word of God in human language, that is propositional revelation. All of the Bible is that *because, all Scripture is God breathed* (2 Timothy 3:16).

## 4) INCARNATION

There is a sense in which it is right to distinguish this category from the others, although it includes all three of the previous ones. In Christ, isn't this personal encounter to the extreme? Are mighty acts demonstrated in Jesus? Think of his miracles. Is Jesus' revelation propositional revelation? Yes, He is giving discourses: the Sermon on the Mount, woes to the Pharisees, parables. All these revelations of Jesus in language are propositional revelation. Even though incarnation involves all three of the previous ones. Hebrews 1 marks off the revelation in Christ as something unique and distinctive that ought to be noted specially.

Heb 1:1 God, after he spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,

So yes, God has spoken; we have had revelation for thousands of years. He has spoken through lots of different prophets at lots of different times. We are not short on revelation; we have had a lot of it but,

Heb 1:2 in these last days has spoken to us in his Son,

So you have this sense of light and heavy, preliminary and full in the contrast the writer of Hebrews is making.

Heb 1:2 in these last days has spoken to us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the world.

Heb 1:3 And he is the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of his nature, and upholds all things by the word of his power.

We have this exalted portrayal of Jesus as the one who is exactly representing God and who, according to Hebrews, now makes God known.

A similar kind of theology comes out of the prologue of John's Gospel.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father,

Do you want to know what the Father looks like, look at Jesus.

John 1:14 ... full of grace and truth. I have a sermon I preach on this, and I am tempted to stop right now and preach it to you, but I won't.

If you notice in that prologue of John grace and truth is used twice. The point of that is that when John says, "We beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father," you could stop right there and ask the question, in what ways did Jesus manifest the glory of the Father? How is Jesus like his Father? There are many ways Jesus is like the Father, but John wants us to see a pair of items in particular: grace and truth. These two qualities are made known. You can find in the Hebrew Bible these key references to God as being the God who abounds in lovingkindness and truth. Exodus 34:6 is one of those references; Through the Psalms you find it repeatedly. John wants us to see that this is the Father manifest in Jesus, full of grace and truth. I think the point is that as we read the Gospel of John we have in mind, all the way through, how does Jesus manifest simultaneously grace and truth? With his mother in chapter 2, with Nicodemus in chapter 3, with the Samaritan woman chapter 4; how does Jesus manifest grace and truth? How should we live? Usually we think of one canceling out the other or compromising the other. Very gracious people are kind of weak on truth. Very truthful people are harsh often times and they cut with truth; they hit with truth; they destroy with truth, they are not gracious. Grace and truth are in the incarnation. The fullest manifestation of God that has ever been made is in Jesus.

In Christ we have the fullest revelation of God that has been known, but don't confuse that with a corresponding doctrine that we have to put alongside of it to balance things out to get a healthy Christology; that is the Kenosis. That is, when Christ took on human flesh, he laid aside something; he poured himself out. It is very important to realize that Jesus lived his life as a man, and therefore certain things that would be true of his nature as God are not necessarily allowed expression. We don't want to say when we are looking at Jesus that everything about God is fully manifest. We've got to be careful in seeing in Christ the fullest expression of God that we have ever known but not confuse that with the fact that he purposely concealed aspects of deity to live like a human among us.

## B) EFFICACY OF SPECIAL REVELATION

General revelation is efficacious; it is able to hold us accountable before God because it shows us sufficiently that there is a God and some things about him. His power and his divine nature are clearly made known Paul says in Romans 1. Yet general revelation is not efficacious for salvation. It doesn't give us saving truth. Special revelation *provides revelation of God's grace and mercy to save sinners*. Special revelation must be made known for that saving truth to come to people. Yet we also understand from Scripture that just the revelation alone is efficacious to save. It is saving revelation in the sense that it does present the truth of the gospel, the truth of God's grace in Christ. However, the presentation alone does not guarantee the truth will be received. To share it does not necessarily mean that it will be received, but there is no hope of being saved apart from the fact that there is this special revelation that is given. The fullness of the Gospel is God's grace in redemptive history leading up to the coming of Christ and all that happens in Christ, his life, death and resurrection all comes out in the formation of the church community that will witness to the world. This is the whole package; it is what God intends for his people to know to be saved and to grow to be conformed more and more to his image

## II) INSPIRATION

### A) DEFINITION

#### 1) GENERAL MEANING

The term inspiration is not a particularly apt term in some ways because we use it in colloquial kinds of ways. We talk about Shakespeare or Mozart being inspired. Then we talk about Paul being inspired. Or we talk about a pastor being inspired while he preaches.

It is meant to be a translation of the word "theopneustos" which is a term found in 2 Timothy 3:16 for God breathed. "Theos" (God), "pneustos" from "pneumo s" which is the Greek word for spirit or breath. It is only used that one time in the Bible so we can't look elsewhere for it. It is clear from the joining of the two terms what it means: God breathed. Inspiration is supposed to communicate that notion. It doesn't do it really well. Actually a better term in one way and worse in another would be "expiration." Then you have "spirit" which is this breathing notion, but you have "spiriting out" ("ex" or exit, out of). That would actually be closer to what "theopneustos" means. The problem is, what does "expire" mean in English? Expiration is when someone dies; you say they expired, so that is not going to work well to communicate the idea. We are stuck with inspiration. That is the word we've got; that's the word we will live with, but let's be clear on what it means. It means then, the out-breathing of God to produce his Word.

That out-breathing takes place through humans. Prophets and Apostles write and as they write, at least in most cases, the Bible is not the result of dictation. There are sometimes when God tells the prophet, go to the people and say this. That might be dictation but most of the Bible is not in that category. Most of the Bible is an author of Scripture (a prophet or an Apostle) writing what he wants to write, and as he writes what he wants to write, it is what God has breathed out to be his Word. As Paul writes to the Galatians, in Galatians 4:19 he says, "*I am as a*

*woman in labor until Christ is formed in you.*" What a vivid image; he is as a woman in labor. As he writes what he wants to write, this is the Word of God breathed out through the Apostle, through the prophet, through the writer of Scripture.

Inspiration communicates this notion of the out-breathing of God to produce his Word. It happens through humans. This is an example, by the way, of one those mega issues where we will spend a fair bit of time of what is called "concurrency." God's sovereignty and human agency are working together in a way in which neither one is compromised. The human agency is at work as Paul writes the book of Galatians; he writes what he wants to write. However, God's sovereignty is at work as he works in Paul and through Paul; as Paul writes what he wants, God gets what he wants. Why do we pay such close attention to grammatical features and care to notice the syntax? Because of a conviction that this is, in fact, the Word of God as he intended it to be, all of it.

## 2. VERBAL, PLENARY INSPIRATION

### *"Verbal Inspiration"*

Verbal inspiration refers to the fact that all the language of the Bible is inspired: its words, its grammar, its syntax. Every bit of the language is breathed out from God as his Word. That is verbal inspiration.

### *"Plenary Inspiration"*

Plenary inspiration is all of the Bible. The language of the Bible, all its details, the words, the syntax, the grammar in all of its parts, in totality verbal plenary is the product of God's out breathing.

We affirm verbal plenary inspiration of the text of Scripture, not the authors of Scripture. We don't say that Paul was verbally "plenarily" inspired. We say the Bible is verbally "plenarily", completely inspired. We affirm of the Bible, first and foremost inspiration because the only time the term is used is 2 Timothy 3:16, "theopneustos"; and what is it used of? All Scripture is inspired by God. In a secondary sense you might refer to the Apostle Paul as being inspired as he writes, but that is not a technically precise way to talk from the Scripture. Because "inspiration" is used one time, in 2 Timothy 3:16, and what it refers to as inspired is what Paul writes, not Paul himself. Balaam spoke the word of God, and he wasn't even a believer. He was a pagan sorcerer in the book of Numbers. The Spirit worked in him to do this; God did it. We have the same process going on, but it is easier to think of Paul under inspiration than it is Balaam under inspiration because he is a pagan. What is inspired primarily is the Bible. There is also 2 Peter 1:21 which speaks of men who were moved by the Holy Spirit and spoke from God. Men were moved by the Holy Spirit, so there clearly is a sense in which the Spirit moves in their hearts and minds, so what they speak and write is, in fact, the Word of God. In that secondary sense, you can talk about them being inspired or moved by the Spirit. The primary sense of inspiration is the text itself; the Bible is inspired. All of its language, in all of its parts are verbally plenarily inspired.

## B. KEY PASSAGES AND THEIR TEACHINGS

### 1. 2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

This is one of the most important passages in helping us understand the nature of Scripture.

2 Ti 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed

Here is that term "theopneustos"; it is inspired by God.

2 Ti 3:16 ... and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

These words are so familiar that I think we can read them and miss the utterly incredible claims that are being made. Meditate on them; they are just astonishing in what they say. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. Look at the whole realm of what Scripture can do. Look at what it is profitable to do: to reprove, to correct, to build up in righteousness, to teach in righteousness so that the man of God may be adequate and equipped for every good work. So you if you believe it, then practice it.

#### A. TRANSLATION ISSUE ALL OR EVERY

The New English Bible translates this passage as follows: "Every God-Breathed Scripture is profitable for teaching and reproof."

Every God-breathed Scripture is profitable; do you sense the difference? You have the God-breathed and, in principle, the not God-breathed Scripture. In that case it isn't profitable and you wouldn't want to follow that stuff, of course. It allows for this discretion of the reader in terms of what is God-breathed and what is not God-breathed. Is this a legitimate translation?

All Scripture is God breathed; "pasa graph\_ theopneustos kai \_phelimos". It is referring to all of Scripture ("pasa graph\_"). It is all of Scripture; it is not referring to every Scripture which is profitable. Part of the problem is what do with the copula (the "is"). Where do you insert the "is" and what do you do with the "and"? Listen again to a traditional translation, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable." Now listen to the New English. "Every God-breathed Scripture is profitable." Do you notice a particular word missing? "And" ("kai"). It just drops out of the picture. It says, "pasa graph\_ theopneustos kai \_phelimos". All Scripture is two things: "theopneustos kai \_phelimos", God-breathed and profitable. The same case endings of those two terms ought to keep together connected by the "kai" (and), so what you ought not do is split them up and make one of them all God-breathed Scripture. Where is the "kai"? This is why all the major translations (with exceptions for what I must say is theological bias), translated in some version of what you have in NIV, NASB, English Standard Version, Revised Standard Version all go the same way with this: that all Scripture is inspired and profitable.

#### B. MEANING OF INSPIRATION

It is interesting that Paul puts in order what he does. Mainly that all Scripture is inspired, then profitable. I think the reason for that is that he wants to make it clear that inspiration is first. This is foundational. So all Scripture is God-breathed. This is what it is; this is the quality of this book. This is why this book is unlike any other book that has ever been written. Even though many Christian people will testify that in writing sometimes there is a sense of God moving, preachers will certainly talk about times when they sensed the Lord took over and spoke through them. I don't doubt that things like that happened, but there is no other writing, no other speech, that is

equivalent to the writing that has taken place in this book. It is all God-breathed, all the way through. So we need to understand Scripture in its fullness as the Word of God.

*C. ONTOLOGY AND FUNCTION (WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT DOES)*

Notice that when Paul says all Scripture is inspired, that indicates what it is. That is ontology. It is the Word of God. It is breathed out by God. Then the next word he gives is it inspired and profitable. This is what it does. But notice the order of the "is" and the "does." Ontology precedes function. What something is precedes what it does. Furthermore, what something can do is a function of what it is.

The reason that we can have confidence that the Bible is profitable for teaching, reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be adequately equipped for every good work is because it is the Word of God. The minute you begin to tear down the quality of what the Bible is, you cannot help but effect what it is able to do, what kind of guide it is for life and what kind of guide it is for ethics.

So function follows ontology. Do you see how important it is to affirm what 2 Timothy 3:16 affirms; all Scripture is God-breathed, therefore it really is profitable. Without question, without reservation, without qualification it really is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.