

What is our authority for our theology, our lives and for the message that we are to give to others? I would argue that this question is the ultimate question that must be answered before one can answer any other and is the central issue of Christianity. It is no less a question than one of life or death—eternally. How can we rely upon the translations we have, just exactly what do we mean when we say these things and why is it important?

Every statement we make and every action we take are guided by Universal Truths that undergird them, even if we are not consciously aware of what they are. It is possible to divide these as variations upon two fundamental categories: 1) God is the ultimate authority; or 2) man is the ultimate authority.

The Orthodox faith holds that the Bible *is* the Word of God, not a representation of it or inerrant only in “the original manuscripts” or in “the original languages.” If that is so, then that would mean that it is not inerrant now as we do not have the original manuscripts of any of the books of the Bible. This would mean that the only real difference between the conservative and liberal positions on the Bible is that the conservatives say the Bible used to be inspired and inerrant, whereas the liberal says it was never inspired or inerrant. Both positions agree that the Bible is not now inspired or inerrant. But what does that lead us to?

Under this kind of thinking, logically, you could accept or reject any portion of the Bible that didn't speak to you and you come to think that you can judge what portions of Jesus teachings are still relevant to this day through historical views, rationalism and/or 'modern' man's thinking. Such is always the case. Since the original manuscripts no longer exist, some other authority must be substituted for them, whether that other authority is a revelation, a Book of Mormon, a Nicene Creed, or a college education. Modern “Bible scholars” realize this only too clearly, and that is why they spend so much time talking and writing about non-existent “originals.” Since the “inspired originals” no longer exist, the scholars and their conjectures replace the Bible and become themselves “the final authority.”

Whether any scholar or “layman” admits it, present-day copies of the “inspired originals” are the only evidence available to support the inspiration of those originals, and unless those copies are also inspired, there is no evidence that the originals were inspired. In fact, if the present day copies are not inspired, then neither were the originals, because inspiration can no more produce non-inspiration than a fig tree can produce apples (II Timothy 3:16).

If that is true, what makes Christianity any different from that of the Buddhist, or Hindu, or Moslem, or Mormon? If the Bible you read from, study from, memorize from, and preach from is not inspired, what makes it any different from the Quran, the Book of Mormon and the Upanishads, none of which is inspired?

If the Bible were inspired only in the original manuscripts, no one today really knows for sure what is in “the Bible” because no one today has ever seen the original manuscripts. Not surprisingly, this is the attitude behind nearly every English “bible” published since 1611. “We can only follow the best judgment of competent scholars as to the most probable reconstruction of the original text,” says the preface to the RSV (ii), not defining just what a “competent scholar” is and to cut through the vague language and admit, “This is what we think the Bible might be.”

If the Bible is no longer inspired, who removed its inspiration? Who gave it in the first place? God gives a man his breath, and only God can take it away (Genesis 2:7, Daniel 5:23). If God gave the Bible its inspiration (and He did—II Timothy 3:16), then only God could have taken it away. If He did, then He

violated His own commandment: *"You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it,"* He tells us in Deuteronomy 4:2, indicating that through His use of the word "from" He is referring to more than just letters or words. If He did, then He lied when He said in Psalm 89:34 that *"I will not violate My covenant or alter the word that went forth from My lips."* According to the Bible rejecters, then, God is guilty of the same sin that they are.

Fortunately, the Bible says nothing about its inspiration being limited to "original autographs" or even "original languages." Of course, many men teach that it does say such a thing, and each of them quotes II Timothy 3:16 to prove the point. But is that what the verse really says? *"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."* (II Timothy 3:14-17)

Looking at the verse in the context in which it appears, you will notice that Paul admonished Timothy to continue (v.14) in those same Scriptures that he had studied as a child (v.15), because those Scriptures are inspired—God-breathed—(v.16) and are able to make the man of God "competent" and "equipped." Did Timothy somehow own the original manuscripts of the Old Testament books? Of course not. Yet the Scriptures which he owned were inspired!

The inspiration of the Bible is present tense—NOW. It is alive and still breathing, and you had better be glad it is. God inspired the Bible for only one reason: *"that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work"* (II Timothy 3:17). If the Bible were inspired only in the original manuscripts you would have no chance of living and working for God the way He wants you to!

II Timothy 3:16 also does not say anything about the Bible being inspired only in the "original languages" (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek). Nor will you find a reference to "original languages" anywhere else in the Bible. In fact, of the four different texts that we have, of all or portions of the Old Testament (Masoretic, Septuagint or LXX, Dead Sea Scrolls and a distinctive Hebrew version of the Pentateuch), the one time we have a quote of what Jesus read in the synagogue, the text followed the LXX (Luke 4:16-19). Further, when Jesus makes reference to Scriptures in the Gospels, He usually does so in agreement with the Aramaic Targum and not the Greek or Hebrew versions of the Old Testament.

According to Isaiah 55:11, one characteristic of the inspired Word is that it shall accomplish what God pleases. What does God desire? He desires that sinners repent of their sins and be saved (Isaiah 55:7, Ezekiel 18:23, II Peter 3:9, Luke 14:23), and the preaching of the inspired Word accomplishes this (Isaiah 55:11, Romans 10:14-15, II Timothy 3:15). The Law only convicts and the Orthodox understanding of Scripture brings the peace that God gives both faith and grace for salvation. Salvation is only found in the Bible and it changes you from within (I Thessalonians 2:13).

We must have God's Word to have faith; faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). And that Word of God has been inspired and preserved down to the 'jot' which is the smallest Hebrew letter and the 'tittle' which is a small part of the letter (Matthew 5:18). So Christ supports the inspiration even down to the individual letters.

When it comes to the Doctrine of Preservation, we must approach the issue by faith, not by human viewpoint, archeologists, scientists, etc. We need to base what we believe by what the Word of God says about itself. We accept many things by faith: virgin birth, death and resurrection of Christ, Trinity, etc. We believe because we read it in a Bible and we believe it through faith (cf. I Thessalonians 2:13,

Hebrews 4:12). The Bible itself also claims to be the Word of God (Matthew 22:31) which is truth itself (John 17:17) and we can trust it (Proverbs 30:5).

There has always been an attack to pervert the Word of God from the beginning (Genesis 3:1-5). So how did the Bible get to be the Word of God? Where do we get the Scriptures? In Psalms we see that God's Word has been settled forever (Psalms 119:89). It was settled in heaven before Adam, before God began to communicate those words to man and man put those words in writing (Psalms 119:152). God's Word is so valuable that He has magnified His Word even above His Name (Psalms 138:2 KJV). Why is His Word so valuable? The answer is found in John 1:1-4: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."* God's Word is Christ and Christ is God. His message was one of "grace and truth" that brings salvation, and not the Law of Moses that brings only condemnation (John 1:17-18).

Besides being inadequate for salvation or even peace of mind, the use of feelings as a "yardstick" to determine what is right or wrong is like having no standard at all for feelings can be both compressed and stretched to fit any desired behavior. Not so with the Bible (if accepted fully in its plain intended meaning and interpreted as Scripture by Scripture), it is God's yardstick. Relativism ultimately leads to man (reason, feelings and desires) as normative, as authority. Each man then fulfills Satan's promise to Eve to be a god like God, *"knowing both good and evil."* But the problem is that Satan does not judge us, Christ does (Matthew 25:31-33).

Scriptures, then, are given by inspiration down through the ages using different men. The men wrote down what God spoke to them. God spoke the written Word into existence. As the men wrote it down then those words became Scripture (I Corinthians 2:9-13; II Samuel 23:2). This Word then becomes the "Rock" upon which our faith is built and the Bible is God speaking to us. Inspiration, therefore, is in reference to the words that were written not the men who wrote down those words. It is not the writers that were inspired but the very words they wrote (cf. Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4; Acts 1:16). The words of God are pure and the words were, are and will be preserved, not just the general message (cf. Psalms 12:6-7; Psalms 33:11; Psalms 119:152).

Jesus, Himself, refers to what was written in the Law and calls it Scripture; words that were written down (John 10:34-35). We too can have assurance that the Word of God abides and lives forever (I Peter 1:23-25). We can also have the assurance that whenever we have people who believe in the inerrancy and inspiration of Scriptures, have prepared themselves well for the undertaking and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide their actions in translation, Holy Scripture, just as inspired, inerrant, infallible and effectual will be produced (Romans 15:4).

God in His omniscience knew that His Word would be attacked. Since the day Satan was cast from Heaven, he has been working furiously to sabotage the Word of God. Satan's very first attack as recorded in Genesis was on God's spoken Word (Genesis 3:1). The serpent's technique was not to engage in a full-fledged frontal attack of outright denial, but rather to undermine the absolute authority of God's Word. Satan is subtle. This is precisely what modernists and atheists are doing when they spiritualize Scripture. "Did God really say that? How do you know that?" "What would we expect Jesus to say based upon history?" "Which parts of the Bible are really for us today?" "If God is love, then isn't anything done in love alright?" Most Christians have heard such things many times. These attacks upon God's revelation in His Word most certainly did not end in the Garden of Eden. They have continued unabated.

In the New Testament, we see another example of Satan's tactics; that of changing God's Word. Immediately following Jesus' forty-day fast, Satan engaged him in a dialogue. Each time Satan tried to tempt Jesus Christ, the Lord answered him by quoting His own words (Matthew 4:4). In the next two verses Satan quoted Scripture to Jesus, boldly altering His words by omitting a key phrase (Matthew 4:5-6. In this example Satan omitted the phrase, "*to keep You in all Your ways,*" demonstrating that the devil is so audacious that he dares to subtract from God's Word when face to face with their author! This, right after being informed that man lives by "*every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*"! If Satan is so bold as to lie to God incarnate, how much more when faced with the likes of fallible men? Another of Satan's strategies has been to obscure God's words by hiding them in a morass of manuscripts and Bible versions. He has used this approach for thousands of years, but during the last century, it has become far more prevalent.

In the end there are only two choices, either God's Word has been preserved and we can trust in it fully for our authority or man is the supreme authority and can decide what is truth and what is not truth. But to look to the Bible as any basis for man's authority by trying to cloak it in the partially divine is not only blasphemy but logically inconsistent and intellectually dishonest. It is not just a matter of interpretation, but rather it must be the final authority. One cannot say that Jesus is only an example of how Christians are to live. It is the whole Word of God that is necessary, "as is" without additions, subtractions or interpretation that depends upon man's reason, feelings or any other man-made standard.

The Doctrine of Preservation of Scripture is the foundation problem that exists with those who question the authority of the Bible. Unbelief in the Doctrine of Preservation is a weakness that can wedge a crack in faith in the Word of God. The Bible is clear about the Doctrine of Preservation:

1. The Preservation of the Word of God is a matter of Biblical fact (Psalms 12:6-7; Psalms 119:15; Psalms 119:160; Psalms 138:2; Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 5:18; Matthew 24:35; John 17:6; John 17:17; I Peter 1:25).
2. It has been preserved for all time (I Peter 1:23; Psalm 12:6-7; Ps. 111:7-8; Isaiah 40:8; Psalm 117:2; Psalm 119:152; Psalm 119:160). Just as the doctrine of inspiration is considered to be foundational to our understanding of the Bible, so should be the doctrine of preservation. They are inextricably linked. An inspired Bible that was not preserved would be little more than a tainted book of history and moral lessons. The Bible's authority is only as great as our confidence in its reliability. A Bible which was delivered to us inspired, and then was allowed to leaven with the accumulated errors of thousands of years, would hardly point to an all-powerful, all-wise Creator. It would be difficult to entrust our salvation in Jesus Christ to the very same God who could not keep His Word pure.
3. The individual words (plenary) have been preserved (Matthew 24:35; Psalm 12:6-7; I Peter 1:23). This aspect of God's preservation of Scripture is just as crucial as the first. So that we could not mistake His intentions, the Lord made clear to what degree He would keep the Scriptures pure. He promised us that He would preserve even the very words. We don't have to wonder whether God merely preserved His thoughts, or His ideas. We know that the very means by which we communicate to each other—words—are crucially important to God. If every word is important, does it not make sense that God would preserve all of His words so that we might be nourished and strengthened?
4. They have been made available to every generation (Psalm 33:11; Psalm 100:5; Psalm 119:89-90; Isaiah 59:21). We know that God's Word has not been hidden or lost to man, since it was first

spoken and recorded in God's written revelation. We can be assured that we have not had to depend on the latest discoveries of the oldest manuscripts, or on the efforts of fallible man to uncover God's words. God has preserved His Word to all generations, without fail!

5. The Word of God is truth (Hebrews 4:12; Psalms 18:30; Psalms 19:8; Psalms 119:140; II Samuel 22:31; Proverbs 30:5). Not only has His Word been preserved, but it is the only source of divine truth and wisdom. All human knowledge, reason and feelings are fallible and will fail us, but God's Word is never false, never fails and is our only guide to salvation.
6. All saving knowledge is obtained from the Word of God, through the Holy Spirit (Romans 10:17; I Peter 1:23; John 17:17; John 1:1; John 1:11-14; John 20:31). It is the indispensable means of salvation, and is the foundation of faith for all who believe. We must receive the Gospel message under the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit which brings the faith that gives Salvation.
7. Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, is the Word made flesh that dwelt among us (II Corinthians 5:21; Romans 5:8-9; Romans 3:20-28; Acts 20:28; Romans 5:9; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Colossians 1:20; Ephesians 2:8-10; Revelations 1:5). Jesus is the Living Word, the Word Personified, the Word made flesh. All who will receive Him (meaning through God's grace as an act of the Holy Spirit are given faith to accept Him as Savior, Lord, and God of their life—Romans 9:16) are saved from the condemnation of their sins. They are saved by Jesus Christ who washes away sin from them through their Baptism, and gives them eternal life.
8. Believing in Jesus Christ for Salvation is the act of trusting Him, and depending on His ability to keep you (Acts 17:30; Mark 1:15; Luke 17:21; Acts 3:19; Acts 20:21; Acts 26:20). Believing (trusting) that His work of Calvary is sufficient payment for you as a sinner, and His Word is given for the direction of the repentant life. Literally, Jesus became our substitute in death for sin on the cross by shedding His blood for our redemption and remission of sins, so that repentant believers will trust Him for life everlasting.
9. Repentance is a gift of God that is the sorrow of heart for past sins leading to a change of heart concerning the direction you intend to follow in the future (Acts 5:31; Acts 11:18; Acts 20:21; Acts 26:20; Romans 2:4; II Corinthians 7:10; II Timothy 2:25; II Peter 3:9). Believing the Gospel is the act of taking the Word and Christ as direction of the future. True faith understands the consequence of sin and turns in heart from it. The new birth gives a desire of obedience to follow the Lord Jesus Christ in Salvation and bear good fruit.