

Topical Studies—The Scriptures

God has graciously unveiled His truth through two distinct windows. First, there is general revelation—the truth God displays across the canvas of creation. When you look up at the stars, you are reading God's creation manual (Psalm 19:1). This natural truth serves as the essential backdrop, the precondition, for studying divine doctrine.

However, general revelation leaves us wanting more. That brings us to special revelation—the truth woven into the very pages of Holy Scripture. This is the only written, infallible revelation from the Almighty.

When theologians speak of the divine *inspiration* of Scripture, we aren't talking about human genius. We mean at least seven foundational realities:

- Divine Origin: Its source is God Himself.
- Human Agency: He used real, historic men—prophets and apostles.
- Verbal Expression: It was recorded in actual, human words.
- Autographic Integrity: It applies directly to the original manuscripts.
- Final Authority: It stands as the supreme rule of faith and practice for every believer.
- Inerrancy: It is completely without error in everything it affirms.
- Canonicity: It is whole, complete, and forever sealed within the 66 books of the Bible.

When Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16 that Scripture is "*given by inspiration of God*," he doesn't mean inspired the way Shakespeare was inspired to write a play. The Greek word here is *Theopneustos*—it literally means God-breathed. The Holy Spirit didn't turn men into passive dictation machines; He superintended their unique personalities, vocabularies, and cultural contexts to record the exact, precise message of God.

As Peter so clearly explains:

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." — 2 Peter 1:20–21

Because of this divine oversight, when Scripture speaks, God speaks. Consider how Paul quotes the Old Testament in Galatians 3:8: "*And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.'*" But if you turn back to Genesis 12:3, those were the direct words of Jehovah to Abraham! To quote Scripture is to quote God.

This inspiration is both verbal (the very words) and plenary (every single part). God told Jeremiah, "*Stand in the court of the Lord's house... speak all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word*" (Jeremiah 26:2).

Strictly speaking, this infallible inspiration rests in the original autographs—the primary manuscripts penned by the prophets and apostles. While certain passages of Scripture may carry heavier theological weight or address core salvation themes, there are no degrees of inspiration. Genesis is just as God-breathed as John, and the historical genealogies carry the exact same divine breath as the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It alone stands as our sole, infallible foundation.

To hold to the divine inspiration of Scripture is to automatically affirm its total inerrancy. The two stand or fall together.

Inerrancy isn't an arbitrary rule invented by theologians; it flows directly from the very nature and character of God. The Bible tells us plainly that it is *"impossible for God to lie"* (Hebrews 6:18). He is immutable, unchangeable, and perfectly truthful in both general and special revelation. The logic is as simple as it is inescapable: If God cannot err, and the Bible is the Word of God, then the Bible cannot err.

When Paul declares that all Scripture is *"given by inspiration of God"* (2 Timothy 3:16) and Peter notes that *"holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Peter 1:21), they are anchoring the truth of Scripture in the perfection of its Author.

Because of this, Scripture is entirely truthful in everything it affirms—not just when it touches on spiritual or doctrinal matters, but also when it speaks to historical and scientific realities.

- On essential doctrine: If the Bible were flawed in its reporting, our faith would collapse. As Paul writes, *"If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty"* (1 Corinthians 15:13–14).
- On historical fact: When Scripture addresses physical origins or human history—such as Adam's historical reality—it speaks with absolute accuracy: *"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned"* (Romans 5:12).

The Attack on Inerrancy

In the late 19th century, a wave of skepticism known as "negative higher criticism" began to sweep through academic circles, undermining confidence in the authority of God's Word. As scholars began to dismantle the text, three primary missteps emerged in response:

1. Liberalism: Abandoned core biblical doctrines altogether. Liberal scholars reduced the Scriptures to a mere collection of human religious writings, claiming the Bible doesn't *is* the Word of God, but merely *contains* human thoughts about God.
2. Neo-Orthodoxy: A political and philosophical compromise. While reacting against the hollow moralism of liberal theology, Neo-Orthodoxy accepted the destructive conclusions of higher criticism. It argued that the Bible is not inherently the Word of God, but only *becomes* the Word of God during a subjective, personal encounter with Christ.
3. Neo-Evangelicalism: Tried to bridge the gap by shifting inspiration away from the actual words of the text to broader "concepts" or "ideas." Some suggested that inerrancy applies only to spiritual or redemptive matters—leaving historical and scientific statements open to error.

The Biblical Anchor

Against these modern compromises stands the historic, orthodox evangelical position. The Bible doesn't merely *contain* God's Word, nor does it merely *become* God's Word in a mystical moment, nor is it merely a container for divine *ideas*.

The Bible, in its original autographs, is the Word of God. Every word, every historical detail, every doctrinal truth rests securely under the infallible breath of Almighty God.

How do we know that the sixty-six books sitting on our nightstands or stored on our phones are truly the exact, divine library God intended us to have? How can we be confident that no essential book was left out, and no counterfeit slipped in?

The answer lies in what theologians call canonicity. The word "canon" originally referred to a measuring reed or a standard rule. When we talk about the biblical canon, we aren't talking about a council of men deciding which books they liked best. We are talking about God's people simply *recognizing* the books that God Himself inspired.

The early Church and ancient Israel didn't guess their way into the canon. They put every candidate book through five fundamental, Spirit-guided tests:

The 5 Tests of Canonicity

1. Was it written by a prophet of God?

If a book wasn't authored by an accredited spokesman for God—a prophet in the Old Testament or an apostle (or close apostolic associate) in the New Testament—it was immediately set aside.

2. Was the writer confirmed by acts of God?

God always authenticates His messengers with divine signs and supernatural backing. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds"* (2 Corinthians 12:12).

3. Does the message tell the truth about God?

Truth cannot contradict truth. Any writing that contained doctrinal error, moral corruption, or clear historical falsehood was rejected. God cannot lie, nor can His Word contradict His revealed character.

Did it come with the power of God?

4. True Scripture carries an inherent, life-transforming quality. The writer of Hebrews reminds us, *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword"* (Hebrews 4:12). Is the text dynamic, changing lives and piercing hearts?

5. Was it accepted by the people of God?

When God spoke through His chosen vessels, the believers living at that time recognized His voice. Jesus said in John 10:27, *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow"*

Me." God's faithful people received, preserved, and read these books as Holy Scripture from the moment they were penned.

When you weigh the texts of history against these five rigorous criteria, only 66 books pass the test—39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. They alone bear the undeniable seal of divine authority, standing together as the complete, infallible, and fully sufficient Word of God for His people.

When we dive into the study of the Bible—what theologians call Bibliology—we uncover a foundational truth: Scripture is *inspired* because it is literally "breathed out" by Almighty God. And because the Creator cannot lie or err, His Word must be completely inerrant—without error in everything it affirms and teaches.

This isn't just a theological theory; it is the explicit conviction of Jesus Christ Himself.

What Did Jesus Think About the Bible?

Jesus, who is fully God, possessed an absolute, unwavering view of the Old Testament Scriptures. He affirmed that they were divinely inspired, supreme in authority, infallible, and accurate down to the smallest detail—whether touching on theology, human history, or the physical world.

Consider His own words in the Sermon on the Mount:

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled."— Matthew 5:17–18

Some modern critics attempt to dismiss Jesus' high view of Scripture by claiming He simply "accommodated" the cultural ignorance of His day, or that His human limitations caused Him to err. But that is impossible! Jesus explicitly declared that His entire message came directly from the Father: *"For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak"* (John 12:49). To say Jesus erred in His view of Scripture is to say God the Father erred.

Jesus didn't just affirm the Old Testament—He also implicitly promised the New Testament. In the Upper Room, He told His disciples: *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you"* (John 14:26).

Final Thought

Remember, when we examine the historic books claiming to be Scripture, only the sixty-six books of our Bible pass the strict tests of canonicity.

What about the extra books—the Apocrypha or the so-called "Gnostic Gospels"?

- The Apocrypha: These writings were never accepted into the Hebrew canon by Jewish scholars. Neither Jesus nor His apostles ever quoted from a single apocryphal book as Scripture, even though they quoted the Old Testament hundreds of times.

- The Gnostic "Gospels": Writings like the "Gospel of Thomas" or "Gospel of Judas" emerged well into the second and third centuries—long after the eyewitnesses had died. They contain bizarre, legendary miracles and blatantly false doctrines that contradict the apostolic faith. The early Church Fathers rightly rejected them as counterfeits.

The sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments alone carry the undeniable footprint of divine inspiration, standing together as our complete, authoritative, and infallible rule of life and faith.

Personal Application

So, how does this truth move from our heads to our hearts as we read the Bible? It's one thing to agree intellectually that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God—it's another thing entirely to let it shape how we actually live.

If Jesus—the Son of God, our Creator and Lord—trusted the Scriptures implicitly, submitted to their authority, and quoted them in moments of temptation, grief, and teaching, how can we do any less?

Here is what that looks like in our daily walk:

- **Read it with Expectancy:** Don't treat your Bible like a dusty textbook or a spiritual obligation. Open it every day with the anticipation that the God of the universe is about to speak directly to your life. When you open your Bible, God opens His mouth.
- **Anchor Your Decisions to It:** When culture pushes one way and God's Word points another, where does your allegiance lie? If Scripture is our final, infallible rule of faith and conduct, we must align our moral compass, our relationships, our finances, and our priorities with what is written—not what feels comfortable.
- **Rest in Its Promises:** Life throws unexpected storms our way—trials, sickness, loss, and uncertainty. In those dark valleys, you don't need human opinions or wishful thinking; you need an unbreakable, stable foundation. When God makes a promise in these sixty-six books, you can rest your life on it, because the One who breathed out these words cannot lie.

Take a moment today to thank God for giving us His complete, perfect Word. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you an appetite for the truth, the humility to yield to it, and the courage to live it out before a watching world.