

*Systematic Theology—
The Doctrine of
Scripture*

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The Doctrine of Scripture—Table of Contents

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The Doctrine of Scripture

I. The Necessity of Scripture

It is appropriate to begin the study of theology with the doctrine of Scripture, even placing its location prior to the doctrine of God. The Westminster Confession does just this.

WCF 1.1 Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable; (1) yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation:(2) therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His Church;(3) and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing;(4) which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary;(5) those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.(6) (WCF 1:1 WCS)

Without a sound doctrine of Scripture, there is really no theology to discuss except the natural revelation of creation or general revelation.

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. (Ps. 19:1 NASB)

Creation reveals the eternal power of God, His moral absolutes and His wrath against sin, but depraved examinations of creation have led to all manner of “futile speculations” about who, or what, God is and how we fit into the broad picture of the universe. What other resources do we have available to us in the pursuit of the true knowledge of God other than the Scriptures? Well, in could be argued, we have the Quran which also claims to be the word of God revealed to Muhammed. This is another discussion which we will take up later. I will only say here in passing that there is no fair comparison between a book written by many authors of diverse educational, economic, and cultural backgrounds over a period of 1500 years with a coherent, consistent message and another book written by one author over a period of 20 years with an incoherent, inconsistent message. It will become clear, I hope, that we cannot accept the Bible as the word of God and the Quran as the word of God simultaneously. We must choose one or the other based upon the best evidence aided by the leading of the Holy Spirit, without Whom we can never know the truth.

By itself, general revelation found in creation renders men inexcusable for not believing in the true God, but falls short of revealing the plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. Because man is fallen in mind and heart, his knowledge of creation is twisted and does not bring him to a proper understanding of who God is nor what God requires of him as His creature. The deficiency is not the fault of God's revelation in creation, but the nature of fallen man in rebellion against God. This fact is eloquently stated by the apostle Paul in Romans 1: 18-25. I will highlight only a portion of this passage.

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. ²¹For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Rom. 1:18-21 NASB)

First, the text says that there is an awareness of the true God in every man.

There is within the human mind and indeed by natural instinct an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty...Since, therefore, men one and all perceive that there is a God and that he is their Maker, they are condemned by their own testimony because they have failed to honor Him and to consecrate their lives to his will.¹

Second, creation itself is an unmistakable witness to the reality of a Creator. The whole universe cries out for the existence of God in that His handiwork is seen in everything that is made.

“...wherever you cast your eyes, there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory.”²

Indeed, Paul says that the invisible attributes of God—**His eternal power and divine nature**—are **understood** by man simply by observing the natural creation. This would include such attributes as eternity, sovereignty, goodness, righteousness, and wisdom. The insufficiency of creation to bring man to salvation is not the deficiency of creation itself as a witness but of man who observes creation, as it were, through sinful eyes. Every object is darkened for a person looking at the world through sunshades. In the same way, sinful man looks at the universe from the darkened perspective of sin which has thoroughly invaded his mind and heart. He refuses to see creation as the work of a personal God with whom he is supposed to have fellowship, but rather looks at creation as something in itself to be worshipped.

Rather than thanking God for creation and worshipping Him for it, he becomes a fool and comes up with all manner of foolish explanations of who God is and how He is to be pleased. Refusing to worship the true God, he fashions a god according to his own liking, a god which does not threaten his desire to be autonomous (independent of God). Therefore, in ancient times, and even to this day, men worship rocks, animals, the sun, the moon, and other things created by God. They also come up with fanciful explanations of the origin of man. Instead of believing the witness of Scripture, they devise endless speculations of how man evolved from lower life forms—the “theory” of evolution which has become the unproved but unquestioned dogma (“law of evolution”) in most institutions of higher learning. The end result of man’s ingratitude is that he has not become wiser, but more and more foolish in his speculations about God and to some extent about creation and life itself.

¹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.3.1.

² Calvin’s *Institutes*, I.5.1.

Furthermore, his ingratitude to His Creator has led to a downward spiral in his moral behavior. Notice in vv. 24-32 of Romans 1 that God permitted man to follow his own lusts of deceit which ended in all manner of perverted behavior, including homosexuality (vv. 26 and 27). One can see from Romans 1 a definite regress (going backwards) in man's religious and spiritual experience rather than the progress from polytheism (worship of many gods) to monotheism (worship of one god), the JEDP theory liberal theologians once promoted without proof, now mostly discredited and dropped from academic discussion.

Again, it is not God's fault that man cannot **know** Him in a saving way by observing creation. There is sufficient evidence of God's attributes all around. If this were not so, then man would have the **excuse** of not believing in the true God. However, it is the unmistakable testimony of Romans 1 that man does not have an excuse for his unbelief (Rom. 1: 20). The evidence for the existence of the true God—not simply **a** God—cannot be missed. Men cannot accuse God of giving insufficient evidence of His existence. But since man's total being is polluted by sin (the doctrine of total depravity), without the testimony of Scripture aided by the Spirit he will not and cannot understand the evidence from creation sufficiently to lead him to a saving relationship with God. For this reason, more is necessary than general revelation (the witness of God to all men in creation) for man to come to a true knowledge of God. By God's grace, He has also made Himself known through His written word given to man by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We call this *special* revelation in that it is given to a special class of sinners whom God would choose out of the world to become His redeemed people.

Both *general* and *special* revelation are incomplete without the other. As we have seen from Romans 1, men still go far astray even in spite of the testimony of creation. On the other hand, without the work of creation, it would be impossible for God to communicate the purpose for which man was made, namely, to have dominion over the earth for the glory of God and in total communion with God (see Genesis 1). In this sense, general revelation and special revelation “feed” and support one another and both are valuable to us in discerning the knowledge of our Creator.

Even before the fall, special revelation was necessary to supplement and interpret creation for Adam. Adam did not have to interpret everything in creation for himself on the basis of tedious, complex, and time-consuming observation. He accepted God's explanation of creation thankfully and submissively until he fell into sin by questioning God and accepting Satan's explanation for creation. After the fall, special revelation was needed to publish the promise of salvation through a redeemer, a promise which could never be understood from creation alone. It was also necessary, as we have said, to correct the twisting and distortion of creation by sinful man who would rather worship the creation rather than the Creator.³

From 1 Corinthians 1: 21, we learn that God never intended for man to **know** Him in a saving way apart from special revelation. The necessity of Scripture was always part of the divine plan from the beginning.

¹⁸For the word of the cross is **foolishness** to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

³ Frame, p.22

¹⁹ For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE."

²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God **made foolish** the wisdom of the world?

²¹ For since **in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God**, God was well-pleased **through the foolishness of the message preached** to save those who believe. (1 Cor. 1:18-21 NASB)

By examining this text along with Romans 1, we conclude that although unbelievers know God, they do **not** know him at the same time. They know who he is and something of his nature and being. They know that they are subject to his judgment because of their sin (Rom. 1: 32). But their knowledge of these things will not lead them to an understanding of how they can be in a right relationship with God, to know him sufficiently and efficiently in order to be saved. General revelation does not reveal God's plan of salvation. It is revealed only through the word of God preached ⁴

In the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1: 21) has been interpreted to mean "in the midst of the manifestation of God in creation". That is, man was surrounded by God's wisdom which was displayed in the wonders of creation, including man himself. Despite this display of wisdom, men did not read it correctly and did not come to know God. This is the interpretation of Charles Hodge, Calvin, Meyer, and others. Albert Barnes in his *Notes* acknowledges this as the most common interpretation, but rejects it in favor of another one, as does Gordon Fee.

In the wisdom of God may also be interpreted as God's **ordination** or **plan**. God never intended that men's observation of creation through unaided human reasoning would result in salvation. If human observation and reasoning had reached that destination, it would have produced the very thing the gospel was **designed** to destroy, the pride, arrogance, and self-sufficiency of man. So then, to prevent any opportunity for boasting, God ordained a means of righteousness which eliminated this possibility. This, of course, begs the question of the necessity of the atoning work of Christ. Was there any other method of saving us at God's disposal? The answer would require a lengthy discussion, but the short answer is NO. There simply was no other way for God to be both just and the justifier of sinners. Christ's testimony is very clear on this point.

"Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. (Lk. 24:26-27 NASB)

Commenting on 1 Cor. 1: 21, Fee says,

Paul asserts that it was within the province of God's own wisdom that he so arranged things. He does not explain how so here, but the reason seems clear. A God discovered by human wisdom will be both a projection of human fallenness and a source of human pride, and this constitutes the worship of the creature, not the Creator. The gods of the "wise" are seldom gracious to the undeserving, and they

⁴ See Appendix A—Clark Pinnock and Inclusivism

tend to make considerable demands on the ability of people to understand them; hence they become gods only for the elite and “deserving”⁵

This interpretation is consistent with the context of Paul’s argument throughout 1 Cor. 1: 18-31 in which he develops the antithesis between the **wisdom** of man and the **foolishness** of the gospel. If men had had their way, they would have devised an entirely different method of salvation based upon one of two things. For the Jews, God’s favor would be earned through keeping the law. For the Greeks (as well as for eastern mystics like Gautama Buddha) ultimate reality, purpose, and meaning would have been understood through philosophical speculation. Paul was well-acquainted with the failure of his own people who had missed the righteousness of God by manufacturing a righteousness based on law-keeping. He was equally familiar with all the philosophical schools of Athens from Plato’s idealism, Aristotle’s empiricism, and Zeno’s stoicism. All the philosophers and philosophical schools had failed in pointing men to God, leading Paul to say,

Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

So, for four thousand years from Adam to Christ (I am a six-day creationist), God conducted a test of man’s reasoning to see if it would come to a positive end—namely, a saving knowledge of God (cf. Barnes’ comment below). The result of this test was never in doubt; yet God proved experimentally that men would consistently fail to put 2 and 2 together to make 4. Even the Old Covenant administration with Israel was a foreordained, purposeful, methodological “failure” in bringing men to God but successful in proving that even in the best of revelatory circumstances amidst the miracles of Moses, Elijah and Elisha, Israel still would not, and could not, believe in Him or keep His law because of inherent sin.⁶

Thus, a new administration of grace was necessary which consisted solely of the proclamation of a “**foolish**” message, first through the NT prophets and apostles, and now through the missionary outreach of the church, the only chosen mediums revealed in the Bible. If the Judaist method of attempting to be right with God through law-keeping—the favored method of most, if not all, other world religions—failed to bring the Jews to salvation, then upon what basis do we claim that any other system of knowledge will be acceptable?

Likewise, even Plato and Aristotle—quite possibly the greatest philosophical minds of human history—failed to bring mankind to an understanding of meaning, purpose, and the underlying justification for human morality and virtue. The history of western philosophy is the history of dead-ends, failures, and self-contradictions. Barnes comments,

(1.) It was desirable that the powers of man should be *fully tried* before the new plan was introduced, in order to show that it was not dependent on human wisdom, that it was not originated by man, and that there was really need of such an interposition. (2.) Because *sufficient time* had been furnished to

⁵ Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 72-73, emphasis mine.

⁶ See Hebrews 8 as well as Paul’s statement of the law’s failure in Romans 8: 3, “For what the law **could not do, weak** as it was through the flesh, God *did*.”

make the experiment. **An opportunity had been given for four thousand years, and still it had failed.** (3.) Because the experiment had been made in the most favourable circumstances. The human faculties had had time to ripen and expand; one generation had had an opportunity of profiting by the observation of its predecessor; and the most mighty minds had been brought to bear on the subject. If the sages of the east [*e.g. Buddha in the 5th century BC, Confucius in the 6th and 5th century BC, D.M.*], and the profound philosophers of the west [*e.g. Plato and Aristotle of the 4th century BC, D.M.*], had not been able to come to the true knowledge of God, it was in vain to hope that more profound minds could be brought to bear on it, or that more careful investigation would be bestowed on it. The experiment had been fairly made and the result was before the world (*Barnes Notes, 1 Corinthians, p. 17*).

This is a profound statement, and it is a partial explanation of why God waited four thousand years from Adam to become incarnate in human flesh. It was to provide tangible, historical proof that men in their frail wisdom could not find their way to God even if given ample time and information, although they should have been able to do so and were culpable for failing.

Therefore, the word of God in the OT was necessary for explaining the way of salvation, and the word of God in the NT is necessary for explaining the fulfillment of the OT in Christ and further elaboration concerning His atoning work and its application for believers.

But further, God has always dealt with His people by means of a written document or covenant. Salvation is a covenant relationship with God demanding a written covenant document outlining the terms (stipulations), promises for keeping the covenant, and threats for violating it. It also outlines the history of God's benevolent acts on behalf of His people.

Without the Lord's words, there is no covenant authority; indeed, there is no covenant. "Obey my voice" and "keep my covenant" are parallel expressions in Exodus 19: 5...The Ten Commandments are "the words of the covenant" (Ex. 34: 28; 2 Kings 23: 3; 1 Chron. 16: 15; 2 Chron. 34: 31)...

So if there are no written covenant words, there is no covenant, nor is there a covenant Lord. Similarly, Jesus says that if we love him, we will keep his commandments...Since Jesus wrote no books, we must trust the writings of his apostles and disciples, the NT books, to mediate our covenant relationship with Jesus...

People often claim to have a personal relationship to Christ, while being uncertain about the role of Scripture in that relationship. But the relationship that Christ has established with his people is a covenant relationship and therefore a verbal relationship, among other things. Jesus' words, today, are found only in Scripture. So if we are to have a covenant relationship with Jesus, we must acknowledge Scripture as his Word. No Scripture, no Lord. No Scripture, no Christ.

And no Scripture, no salvation. Salvation is a work of God's covenant lordship, in which the Lord intervenes to deliver his people. Salvation in the ultimate sense, salvation from sin, is the result of Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection. But it is also verbal. For we learn of it in a divine message, the gospel, and we receive salvation by faith in that gospel message. "So faith comes from hearing, and

hearing through the word of Christ (Rom. 10: 17). Without that message, that gospel, there is no possibility of salvation.⁷

II. The Inerrancy and Infallibility of the Scriptures

A. What inerrancy Does Not Mean.

Evangelical scholars have always maintained the importance of the inerrancy of the Scriptures, but before we define what inerrancy is, it is also important to determine what inerrancy is not.⁸

1. No grammatical errors in the Bible

First of all, inerrancy does *not* mean that there are no grammatical errors in the Bible in the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts (known as the autographa). The Bible has many authors who came from many diverse backgrounds. Amos was an uneducated shepherd while Isaiah was an educated man of noble birth. The apostle Paul was a well-educated Pharisee while Peter was a simple fisherman.

Unless we are willing to accept the theory of mechanical dictation, which says that the Holy Spirit dictated the words of Scripture to all the writers in such a fashion that their personalities and abilities were by-passed, we would expect there to be great differences in the style of writing and grammar from author to author. Hebrew and Greek scholars tell us that this is exactly what we find. Paul's Greek grammar is better than Peter's, but this in no sense diminishes the authority of Peter's message. It is just as authoritative and inspired as Paul's. The prophecy of Amos is just as authoritative as Isaiah's, although Isaiah's Hebrew is more eloquent.

Gerard Van Groningen was an OT scholar who was my professor at Reformed Theological Seminary in 1976. In class one day, he illustrated the distinction between biblical authority and grammar. His father was a no-nonsense Dutch farmer whose English was not as good as his Dutch. Calling out to his sons in the pasture, he commanded, "Throw some hay the cows the fence over", translated, "Throw some hay over the fence to the cows." But the sons did not need correct grammar. They knew exactly what he wanted, and his words rang out with absolute authority.

Inerrancy does not require divine grammar, but divine truth, which God communicates to us in a variety of styles from the educated grammar of Paul and Isaiah to the less educated and simple grammar of Amos and Peter. When He inspired human writers to communicate this truth, the important thing was that they communicate it in language that could be understood by the people, all kinds of people. Quran scholars tell us that the Quran is untranslatable. To be understood, it must be understood in the original Arabic. This, of course, presents an insurmountable problem for non-Arabic speaking Muslims around the world who must depend on translations which are

⁷ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pp. 212-213.

⁸ For a thorough treatment of this subject, see Paul D. Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy" in *Inerrancy*, Norman L. Geisler, editor. The following discussion is partly drawn from his essay.

merely “interpretations” of the Quran. This mentality is ironically similar to that of the Roman Catholic Church in the 14th century which insisted on the exclusive use of the Latin Vulgate. John Wycliffe (1328-1384) and his followers translated the Latin Vulgate into English which could be understood by the common people. Wycliffe and the later reformers understood that God wished to be understood by common people speaking every language under the sun and that He wished the Bible to be translated in as many languages as possible. Some translations are better than others, but if the essential meaning of each text is preserved, God’s goal of making Himself known has been achieved. The transmission of the Scriptures into multiple languages has been divinely ordained and protected throughout the centuries. More on this later.

2. No figures of speech

Secondly, inerrancy does not exclude figures of speech, but is rather enriched by them. For example, Scripture writers use hyperbole, or exaggeration. Some examples:

"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."³ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and **all Jerusalem with him**. (Matt. 2:2-3 NASB)

In Matt 2:3, Matthew does not intend to say that every single person in Jerusalem was troubled along with Herod. Many in Jerusalem were quite happy with the news. However, Herod was such a powerful and cruel man that when he was troubled most people would be upset, fearing the backlash of his alarm. Their fear was justified, for Herod slaughtered the male Jews in Bethlehem as a means of eliminating any threat to his throne (Matt. 2: 16).

Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; (Matt. 3:5 NASB)

Likewise, Matthew cannot be accused of error when he says in Matt 3:5 that **Jerusalem...and all Judea** was going out to John the Baptist. It is not likely that every single individual in Jerusalem, Judea, and the district around Jordan showed up to be baptized by John. He simply means that large numbers of people came to be baptized by John. Matthew’s exaggeration is a perfectly acceptable figure of speech which everyone uses, including Jesus and the Biblical writers. In a typical African village, one might exclaim, “Everyone in town came out to the football game today!” No one would try to explain to him that there were probably exceptions: people who had to work, old people confined to their homes, sick people, Africans who don’t like football, if such people actually exist in Africa. Notice this exaggeration (hyperbole) from Jesus.

"Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? (Matt. 7:3 NASB)

Did Jesus not know the difference between a **log** and a **speck**? Is this an error in the Bible?

Another figure of speech is personification, treating an inanimate object as if it were human. This would include the identification of God with Scripture. For example, in Gal.3:8 Paul says the Scripture “foresees” and **preaches**. It was God alone who foresaw that He would justify the

Gentiles by faith, and it was God who said, **All the nations shall be blessed in you.** Yet, Paul treats Scripture as if it were God Himself.

Scripture writers also use the part for the whole or synecdoche. In Gal. 1:16 Paul says that he did not immediately consult with **flesh and blood** before he preached the gospel. He means that he did not consult with any human being, including the apostles. Flesh and blood are parts of the body taken for the whole person. In Romans 3:30 Paul uses a metonymy, the use of the name of one thing for that of another with which it is closely associated (Webster). **The circumcised** is a metonymy for the Jews and the **uncircumcised** for the Gentiles. These are just a few examples of figures of speech used in the Bible which do not represent errors.

3. Historical, linguistic, and scientific precision

Thirdly, inerrancy does not demand historical, linguistic, or scientific precision. The biblical writers always reflected the standards of accurate reporting for their day, but those which may not be appropriate for our modern era.⁹ As Frame insists, “*precision* and *truth* are not synonymous.”¹⁰ Truth requires a certain degree of precision which differs according to the context. If scientists send a man into space, the mathematics of propulsion lifting the spacecraft off the ground must be scientifically precise. I remember when the Challenger space shuttle exploded after a few minutes in orbit in 1985, killing the entire crew. The defective O-ring allowed hot exhaust gases to escape from the rocket booster. In situations like this, there is no room for error. The history of technology depends on mathematical precision. Even when doing simple calculations, $2 + 2$ must always equal 4. If someone tells you otherwise, he has made an error. Even carpenters depend on measurements in millimeters rather than centimeters; or, if you are in the US, sixteenths or eighths rather than half an inch—that is, if you want your rafters to stay up. The imprecision concerning the effects of heat on the Challenger O-ring costs human lives.

But precise accuracy is seldom needed in everyday speech or reporting an event. Frame uses the example of disclosing one’s age or buying retail items.¹¹ If someone asks a person’s age, he rounds his age off to the last birthday. I’m 72, but my birthday was over two months ago. Have I lied, and would I be accused of being mistaken about my age? Of course not. I am 72 before I get to 73. Any more detail would be unwanted information: I am 72 years, 2 months, and 20 days, old. Who cares, and who wants that much precision about my age? Here in the US, retailers often give precise prices on their merchandise. A piece of 2 x12 lumber may cost \$29.99 (twenty-nine dollars and 99 cents). That’s one penny short of \$30, but the buyer gets the impression he is buying the item under \$30—which is true, but not practically true. This is one example of meaningless nonsense in the US retail world, but it must work because all retailers do it.

Likewise, some biblical writers may round off numbers or give approximate dates while other writers in reporting the same events may be more precise. For example, Gen. 15:13 and Acts 7:6 say that the Israelites were in bondage in Egypt for 400 years, while Ex. 12:40 says the period was

⁹ We could now have a long discussion about the “accuracy” of modern journalism which comes closer to editorializing and opinion writing. Modern reporters are generally pushing an agenda; and quite frankly, the Biblical writers were doing so as well. The difference is that the agenda was God’s.

¹⁰ Frame, DWG, p. 171.

¹¹ Frame, DWG, p. 172.

430 years. The writers of the Genesis and Acts passages were merely rounding off the number rather than attempting to get the exact time.¹² The real question is whether the statement is generally accurate according to the intent of the author. If I say I lived in Uganda for 11 years, my statement would be accurate. If I say I lived in Uganda from October 30, 2003, to December 14, 2014, my statement would be more accurate. If I fail to report that Fran and I were making regular trips back to the US during that period to visit family, no one would accuse me of lying about how long I lived in Uganda. I don't have to report how long our visits to the US were.

Inerrancy also does not demand scientific exactness. God gave us the Bible through fishermen, farmers, and occasional scholars, but not scientists. The writers used what is called phenomenological language to express observable events. For example, when Moses tells us that **the sun was going down** (Gen. 15: 12), he is not attempting to give us an astronomy lesson. We know that the earth revolves around the sun, but he was not implying that the earth is flat or making any statement about astronomy at all. He is only speaking as we do all the time when we say that the sun goes down at about 7 PM in the evening in Uganda and Kenya.

4. Exact quotations from Old Testament passages

Further, inerrancy does not require verbal exactness in the citation of Old Testament passages by New Testament writers. When we quote other writers, we quote word for word using quotation marks, etc. The biblical writers were not constrained to do that, but it was often their practice to give the general meaning of the writer they were citing. Notice Romans 3:4 and Ps. 51:4.

Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge. (Ps. 51:4 NASB)

May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar, as it is written, "THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED." (Rom. 3:4 NASB)

Paul does not quote the text exactly but yet retains the essential content of the citation for his purpose. He only wishes to show that God's integrity cannot be questioned. Besides, Paul is not quoting directly from the Hebrew text at all but from a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament called the Septuagint. Whenever something is translated from one language to another, differences inevitably occur; but this does not affect the truthfulness of the statement at least with respect to Scripture which God superintended and protected from error with His providential grace.

5. Detailed and exhaustive reporting

Inerrancy also does not require that the writers report everything in exhaustive detail. For example, in Matt 8:28, we are told that two demoniacs met Jesus while Luke. 8:27 mentions only one. Apparently, one of the demoniacs was more aggressive than the other who did not play an important part in the dialogue with Jesus. This omission of detail does not mean that there is an error. Obviously, if there were two demoniacs, there was at least one. It simply did not suit Luke's

¹² Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis*, Vol. 1, p. 435.

purposes to mention the other demoniac, whose presence was not important for the story. This line of reasoning applies to many parallel texts in the Synoptic gospels which report different details in the story or report the same detail differently.

B. The Meaning of Inerrancy and Infallibility

According to Paul Feinberg,

Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences.¹³

For example, what does the Bible “affirm” when it says **the sun was going down** in Gen. 15: 12? Was it affirming that the earth was flat or that the sun revolved around the earth, or was it affirming that it was getting dark and that it appeared to Abraham that the sun was disappearing from the horizon? Obviously, the latter.

Frame likes the *American Heritage College Dictionary* definition of “inerrancy” which defines it as “freedom from error or untruths.”¹⁴ My 1980 *Webster’s New World Dictionary* defines “inerrant” as “making no mistakes”. I can live with that, for the God who “breathed out” (*theopneustos*) the Scriptures makes no mistakes about anything. He makes no mistakes about who He is or what He does. He is infinitely knowledgeable of His being and His providential control of the universe and all the inhabitants of the earth. He makes no mistakes about the plan of salvation and its accomplishment in history or about astronomy, biology, just penalties for crimes, etc. Nor can He ever make any mistakes. This brings up another word, “infallibility”. If God is infallible, then His word must also be infallible, unless we accuse God of deception. Infallibility “denies the *possibility* of error”.¹⁵ In other words, the Scriptures are without error and can therefore be trusted.

As Frame explains, error comes either from “deceit” or “ignorance”, neither of which may be attributed to God.¹⁶ He did not deceive mankind by claiming that Jesus was born of a virgin if, in fact, He was born from normal procreation; and there is nothing lacking in His knowledge leading Him to say something in error. God is omniscient (all-knowing) which means that His knowledge of any subject is inexhaustible, eternal, and entirely true. He is also independent of man which means that His knowledge cannot be expanded through human instruments or through the process of time.

Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor **has informed Him?** (Isa. 40:13 NASB)

God is not **informed** by modern science; therefore, whatever divine words were “breathed out” of His mouth (anthropomorphically speaking) in ancient history are infallible and inerrant scientifically, keeping in mind the principle of phenomenological language describing events as

¹³ Geisler, *Inerrancy*, p. 294

¹⁴ DWG, p. 168.

¹⁵ Frame, DWG, p. 169, emphasis his.

¹⁶ Frame, DWG, p. 169.

they appeared without concern for scientific precision. No one needs to inform God that the earth revolves around the sun or that the heart is the organ which pumps blood throughout the human body—although the heart is used commonly in scripture for the central aspect of a man's being (e.g., Mk. 7: 21; Lk. 6: 45). The human writers under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit were not writing for scientists but for common people. Yet, the Bible, by logical deduction from the omniscience and veracity (truthfulness) of God, cannot be accused of inaccuracy concerning anything related to the natural world or natural revelation.

Some theologians are reluctant to ascribe inerrancy and infallibility to the Bible on subjects like history and science. If the Scriptures are free from error concerning the way of salvation, why should we be concerned if it is in error concerning the solar system or the beginning of human life? Much protest has been made concerning when the fetus in a mother's womb becomes a human person with human value and legal protection under the law. Considering the level of biblical ignorance, one would wonder if even God knew the answer to this question, but do the following texts add any light on the subject?

The LORD said to her, "**Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples will be separated from your body;** And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger." (Gen. 25:23 NASB)

Nations and **peoples** are both collections of human beings, not impersonal human tissues which may be discarded with the day's garbage—as they are discarded in abortion clinics throughout the world.

"**Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,** And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." (Jer. 1:5 NASB)

God knows people, not inanimate cells multiplying in the uterus.

For You formed my inward parts; **You wove me in my mother's womb.** ¹⁴I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. (Ps. 139:13-14 NASB)

Personhood is implied in the active work of God meticulously forming the different parts of the person into a **wonderful work** of His image. And I believe most everyone's **soul knows it very well**, but selfish convenience will not allow them to admit it.

"If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet **there is no injury**, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges *decide*.²³ But if there is **any further injury**, then you shall appoint *as a penalty* life for life,²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise. (Exod. 21:22-25 NASB)

There is no injury implies that neither the mother nor the unborn baby was injured in the accident and premature birth. But if either were injured or killed, the punishment would be proportionate to the injury or accidental homicide—**life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth**, etc. Since the death of the mother or baby would not have been intentional murder, the culprit would most likely have

been allowed to pay a ransom for his own life. This is a logical inference from other legal texts, for example,

"If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring and its owner has been warned, yet he does not confine it and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and **its owner also shall be put to death.**³⁰ **If a ransom is demanded of him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is demanded of him.** (Exod. 21:29-30 NASB)

The text assumes that the family of the deceased man or woman is willing to accept a **ransom** from the one whose ox killed their relative, a ransom worthy of the owner's life—**whatever is demanded of him.** Obviously, the relatives cannot demand a ransom from **the owner** who has already been **put to death.** It is not difficult to conceive that the owner would be more than willing to pay whatever they ask. Thus, God knows more about just punishment and jurisprudence (legal philosophy) than we do.

In agreement with true science rather than the pseudo-science agenda of the modern age, the Scriptures recognize the developing fetus as a person. Therefore, it is symptomatic of a general ignorance of Scripture—or blatant sinfulness—for evangelicals who say they believe the Bible to be undecided about abortion, even abortion due to rape and incest. The issue seems straightforward.

"Fathers shall not be put to death for *their* sons, **nor shall sons be put to death for *their* fathers;** everyone shall be put to death for his own sin. (Deut. 24:16 NASB)

"The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself. (Ezek. 18:20 NASB)

The unborn child, male or female, should **not be put to death** for the sin or his or her rapist father or other incestuous relative. It is not the child who deserves death, but the person who violated the mother.

I have included this discussion only as an illustration of how little the Bible is respected on issues which have incalculable repercussions for whole societies. Simple examination of the Scriptures filters the muddy water concerning what the Bible says about abortion millennia before sonograms or ultrasounds were available. There is a baby squirming around in the mother's womb which deserves the legal protection of society, precisely what the OT legislation provides 3,500 years ago, but modern, scientifically sophisticated society does not!

Man's reason is often unreliable. If we trace scientific knowledge backwards through history, the correlation (relationship) between hand-washing and the transmission of disease was not discovered until the mid-1800's and was not widely accepted by the general medical community until much later. Are we willing to accept what the scientific community tells us as "the facts" when there are others who are disputing the claims of the majority, as in the recent "science" of Covid-19 which was irrefutable until it wasn't irrefutable. Most people don't know even now that there were thousands of reputable scientists who did not agree with the effectiveness of Covid lockdowns or the vaccine while the world was still in the middle of the Covid crisis. Stephen

Hawking, one of the most imminent scientists of our time, said that there is no God; but the Bible says, **The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.”** (Ps. 14: 1).

Men make mistakes, but God doesn't. Many (most?) modern theologians do not believe that it reasonable to believe in an infallible and inerrant Bible written by human beings. However, the fundamental premise (assumption) for their dismissal of the idea is the same for their dismissal of miracles, including the virgin birth of Christ and the dividing of the Red Sea; namely, God is not omnipotent (all-powerful). As Packer explains,

*To limit God's sovereignty is to undermine “sola Scriptura”...If God is not in absolute control of free human acts generally, then he was not in absolute control of the writings done by the biblical authors, and it cannot in that case be fully true that “the mind of the Spirit is understood when the text of the document is understood.” It was inevitable that Arminian and deist theology, which both take God's governing hand away from man's self-determined actions, should have produced lowered views of inspiration and a style of exegesis which convicted the inspired authors of making mistakes...The Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* presupposes the Reformation view of God, and cannot be maintained apart from it...*

...we must never lose sight of the fact that our doctrine of God is decisive for our concept of Scripture, and that in our controversy with a great deal of modern theology it is here, rather than in relation to the phenomena of Scripture, that the decisive battle must be joined.¹⁷

To put it another way, the primary trouble that many have with inerrancy is based not so much on what the Scripture says about itself as on what the Scripture says about God. They don't like what Scripture clearly says about God's sovereign control over “all His creatures and all their actions”, as the Westminster Confession puts it. Men want to be in control, and to allow that God was in control of what the human writers of Scripture said is to admit that He is in control of what they—modern theologians—do. On the other hand, if we believe in a sovereign and omnipotent God, we have no trouble believing in an autographa which God preserved from errors.

This, of course, brings up the obvious “why” questions. Why did God permit the autographs to be lost? Why did God allow errors in copies of the autographs? Frame, as well as others, has suggested that the original autographs would have become objects of worship, like the brass serpent (2 Kings 18; 4). Besides, possession of the autographs would not solve all the differences in interpretation and application of the Scriptures. Virtually all the heated theological debates hinge on questions of God's sovereignty in salvation and human activity, the problem of evil, belief in the message of the gospel as the only means of salvation, etc. They do not hinge on the many discrepancies in Scripture which deal with numbers.¹⁸ Consider the following examples:

Solomon had **40,000** stalls of horses for his chariots, and **12,000 horsemen**. (1 Ki. 4:26 NASB)

Solomon had **four thousand** stalls for chariot horses, and **twelve thousand horses**. (1 Ki. 4:26 NIV)

¹⁷ J. I. Packer, “‘Sola Scriptura’ in History and Today” in *God's Inerrant Word—An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, John Warwick Montgomery, pp. 58-59, 60. emphasis mine.

¹⁸ Frame, *DWG*, p. 249.

There is a difference here between the Hebrew manuscripts used by the two translations. **Four thousand stalls** seems far more likely than **40,000 stalls**. Whether 4,000 or 40,000, discovering the correct number is not essential for our salvation or practice; nor for that matter, whether there were **12,000 horsemen** or **twelve thousand horses**. Another copy error occurs in 1 Samuel.

He struck down some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. He struck down of all the people, **50,070 men**, and the people mourned because the LORD had struck the people with a great slaughter. (1 Sam. 6:19 NASB)

And he struck some of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they looked upon the ark of the LORD. He struck **seventy men** of them, and the people mourned because the LORD had struck the people with a great blow. (1 Sam. 6:19 ESV)

But God struck down some of the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh, putting **seventy** of them to death because they looked into the ark of the LORD. The people mourned because of the heavy blow the LORD had dealt them. (1 Sam. 6:19 NIV)

Quite certainly, it mattered to the people of Beth Shemesh whether 70 men were killed or 50,700. The first figure of 70 is far more likely. But does essential Christian doctrine or one's eternal destiny hang in the balance because of this number? Not really. This is also true when we encounter discrepancies in the gospel accounts.

When He came to the other side into the country of the **Gadarenes**, **two men** who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs. *They were* so extremely violent that no one could pass by that way. (Matt. 8:28 NASB)

They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the **Gerasenes**.² When He got out of the boat, immediately **a man** from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him, (Mk. 5:1-2 NASB)

Then they sailed to the country of the **Gerasenes**, which is opposite Galilee.²⁷ And when He came out onto the land, He was met by **a man** from the city who was possessed with demons; and who had not put on any clothing for a long time, and was not living in a house, but in the tombs. (Lk. 8:26-27 NASB)

Matthew mentions **two** demon-possessed men while Mark and Luke mention only **a man**. Other than providing a useful discrepancy for those who deny inerrancy, the difference makes no difference. Jesus heals at least one of the men, demonstrating His power over demons. If there were two men in the story, there was at least one whom Matthew considered more important to the story. The same weight can be ascribed to the manuscript differences in the location: **Gerasenes** or **Gadarenes**. I have never heard of any theological debates about the spelling of this geographical location, although theologians split hairs over a lot of things. These examples are typical of the kinds of scribal errors found in the ancient copies of the autographa which have no bearing on the important ethical and theological teaching of the Scriptures.

I am not implying, however, that any of the examples above are unimportant, but that various texts in the Bible have relative importance as they relate to redemption, the nature of God, Christ, etc. Modern scholars have drifted into the logical error of saying that the Bible does not have to be scientifically accurate for its moral and theological infallibility to be maintained. See below.

This leaves the question of why God didn't make the copies inerrant. We might as well ask why God didn't inspire perfect textual criticism, perfect translations of the copies, perfect interpretation, perfect preaching, perfect evangelization, perfect comprehension and application, etc.¹⁹ However, God's normal providence has allowed all these imperfections in the human instruments who are dedicated to His kingdom—but not perfectly dedicated.

1. Logical Fallacies Pertaining to Inerrancy and Infallibility

John Warwick Montgomery exposes and refutes the logical fallacies of those who wish to maintain the “theological and moral infallibility” of the Scriptures without maintaining its inerrancy and infallibility on matters pertaining to geography, science, or history.²⁰ I will summarize the fallacies and his refutations below.

Fallacy 1: We can rely on the moral and theological (spiritual) content of the Bible without insisting that the Bible is historically or scientifically accurate. Human authors cannot be expected to reflect knowledge unavailable to them at the time of writing. However, the saving knowledge of God in the Bible is valid and true regardless of errors which have no bearing on one's salvation.

This is what has been called “spiritual inerrancy”. The Bible is authoritative where it counts the most but not authoritative where it doesn't count. For example, the manner in which God saved Israel and destroyed the Egyptian army in Exodus. Does it really matter whether He parted the Red Sea or not since our salvation doesn't depend on the accuracy of the biblical story—although Israel's salvation certainly did!

But this theory begs many questions. How does one determine which parts of the Bible “count” for salvation and which don't? Which are important and which are not? Is the Sermon on the Mount accurate or fabricated? Is Jesus' ethical instruction in the sermon historical? Did He really say what the biblical writer claims he said? If so, is His teaching valid or invalid? Is anger really a form of murder or lust a form of adultery? Are other doctrines in Scripture important, like the virgin birth of Christ or His humanity and deity co-existing in a single personality? Does it matter?

This kind of thinking, Warwick says, sets up an unbiblical “dualism” between the spiritual (or sacred) and the secular which does not exist in the Bible. All the propositions (statements of fact) in the Bible comprise a seamless fabric which cannot be torn apart without destroying the integrity of the fabric. If God did not divide the Red Sea as Moses claims, then did He really become incarnate in human flesh and die on a cross to save us? If we cannot trust Him to tell us the truth about “secular” matters like seas dividing, can we trust Him to tell us the truth about salvation?

Fallacy 2: Jesus' false claims concerning the infallibility of the OT do not affect His saving power. Jesus invariably affirmed the inerrancy of the OT, when in fact, there are known historical errors in the OT. However, we may still trust His inerrant teaching in matters pertaining to salvation.

¹⁹ Frame, *DWG*, pp. 249-250.

²⁰ John Warwick Montgomery, “Biblical Inerrancy: What is at Stake?” in *God's Inerrant Word—An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, John Warwick Montgomery, pp. 15-42.

This fallacy is related to the previous one. If Jesus is mistaken about the reliability of the OT, how can we be sure that He is not also mistaken about the way of salvation? Perhaps He is wrong about this, too, as well as much of His ethical teaching. We can scarcely claim confidence in what He teaches about divorce, greed, and the kingdom of God if He believed sources which are in fact fabrications or mythology—like the story of Jonah, which Jesus affirmed to be true (Matt. 12: 40-41).

On the other hand, if Jesus only pretended to believe in the inerrancy of the OT to encourage belief that He was the promised Messiah, then we must accuse Jesus of pragmatism—the end justifies the means. If the pretense brings a good result—namely, faith from the masses who believed the OT stories—then pretending to believe in the authority of the OT is justified. But this theory questions Jesus’ moral integrity and renders Him unfit to die for the sins of the world.

Fallacy 3: Scripture was written by humans, and humans are fallible; they make mistakes. Therefore, the Bible contains mistakes because of its human origin.

But, as Warwick argues, although humans make mistakes, they are not mistaken all the time. I would offer the example of science and technology. As I have said, not all science is true science. Some of it has been mistaken, like the practice of bleeding patients (“bloodletting”) to rid them of disease in the 17th and 18th centuries and possibly 3,000 years previously. Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones (1899-1981), a medical doctor and theologian/preacher in England said,

If you study the history of science, you will have much less respect for its supposed supreme authority than you had when you began. It is nothing but a simple fact of history to say that a hundred years ago and less [mid-1800’s to latter 1800’s] scientists were teaching dogmatically and with extreme confidence that the thyroid gland and pituitary gland, and other glands were nothing but vestigial ^[21] remains. They said that they had no value and no function whatsoever.²²

But true medical science has come a long way since then because of valid theories and experiments, resulting in longer life-spans. Men have also been transported to the moon on the basis of valid mathematical calculations. Scientists are often wrong, but they are not wrong all the time and as a matter of necessity, thanks to God’s common grace bestowed upon humanity as a whole. That is, it is not logically necessary that men are always fallible because they are human. If complete fallibility were a necessary condition for being human, then one would not be human unless he was mistaken all the time; and human progress would never have occurred. Moreover, Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, was also fully human but did not err. If uninterrupted error is a necessary condition of being human, Jesus could be infallible in everything He said and did, for this would render Him inhuman. Therefore, our view of inerrancy has grave implications for the doctrine of Christology. An errant human being cannot save us.

²¹ “Vestigial” refers to part of the body, in this case, the human body, which no longer has any function due to evolutionary development. Lloyd-Jones must have been referring to the influence of Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*, published in 1869, which deeply influenced the thinking and research of the medical community.

²² Renéé Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, p. 318, quoting from D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Authority*, pp. 41-43.

The inerrantist position is that God prevented the human writers from erring at any time in their production of the Scriptures. A sovereign God is capable of inspiring fallible human beings to write the infallible word of God. Peter proved himself fallible in the way he treated Gentile Christians in Syrian Antioch (Gal. 2: 11-21), and Paul was probably mistaken when he refused to take along John Mark on his second missionary journey with Barnabas, causing him and Barnabas to separate (Acts 15: 36-39). At the very end of his life, Paul acknowledges Mark's usefulness in ministry (2 Tim. 4: 11). Yet when he wrote his NT letters and taught the churches, everything he said without exception was the infallible word of God.

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received **the word of God which you heard from us**, you accepted *it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God*, which also performs its work in you who believe. (1 Thess. 2:13 NASB)

If anyone does not obey **our instruction** in this letter, take special note of that person **and do not associate with him**, so that he will be put to shame. (2 Thess. 3:14 NASB)

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel **contrary to what you received**, he is to be accursed! (Gal. 1:8-9 NASB)

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, **according to my gospel**, (2 Tim. 2:8 NASB)

There is no hint of ambiguity or uncertainty in these texts concerning Paul's self-awareness of his calling as an apostle to carry forward the truth of Christ's teaching. Doubtless there are others even in the 21st century who claim to have the same calling and authority as Paul. We will discuss this later under "The Sufficiency of the Word of God"; but for now, suffice it to say that the prophetic witness of the OT and the apostolic witness of the NT proceeded from the total conviction that they spoke and taught upon the authority of the very word of God. But whom among us today can exhort a congregation of God's people to **Remember Jesus Christ...according to my gospel**? I cannot personally say that the gospel is my gospel. It is not my gospel. It is the gospel of Christ handed down to me through the historic church (not the Roman Catholic Church) which carried forward the apostolic traditions providentially recorded for us in the Holy Scriptures and written for us in such a way that even small children can understand their basic meaning.

Fallacy 4: Since inerrancy applies only to the original autographs (original documents) of the Scriptures, then arguments over inerrancy are irrelevant since we no longer have those autographs.

Conservatives admit that neither the copies of the original autographs nor translations of the copies are inerrant, so what is the point of arguing for an inerrant and infallible Bible which no longer exists? But there is also the discipline called textual criticism. Textual critics—experts in the ancient languages of the Bible—have painstakingly examined ancient copies of the autographa (the original biblical manuscripts) for differences among the copies. Textual critics have found that the number of textual differences among the copies decreases as one moves chronologically backward to the time the original autographa was written. That is, there are fewer textual differences among the older copies than among the newer ones, as one would expect since the

more times something is copied, the more likelihood of errors in the transmission. Therefore, the older manuscript copies have greater significance in determining what the original autograph actually said. More on this subject later, but for now, no differences have been found in any of the manuscripts, older or newer, which changes a single point of doctrine necessary for the faith and practice of the believer.

Fallacy 5: Even textual criticism is an inexact science which cannot yield absolute certainty of the Bible's inerrancy.

While this claim is true, the overwhelming testimony of Christ in the gospel accounts—accounts which have been reproduced through textual critical methods—proves that Christ considered the OT Scriptures to be inerrant. Later on we will examine Christ's teaching on the authority of the OT.

2. Inerrancy applies only to the Scriptures in the original Greek and Hebrew manuscripts, the autographa, but the autographa is faithfully preserved in the copies.²³

If we do not assume the integrity of the Bible, there would be little practical purpose in systematizing material which is unreliable, and consequently non-authoritative; yet many liberal theologians have proceeded to do so with little consideration of the inconsistency of their labors. Carl F. H. Henry, one of the leading conservative theologians of the twentieth century, makes note of this fact by quoting Alan Richardson, who does not believe in the divine inspiration of Scripture but understands the implications of his position.

If, as a result of the application of scientific, historical and literary methods...to the books of the Bible, it was now no longer possible to believe in the literal inerrancy of scripture...in what sense could it still be believed that the Bible is authoritative?²⁴

It should be clear to all that the trustworthiness of the Scriptures and the authority of the Scriptures go hand in hand. We cannot have one without the other. However, we are not required to take a "leap of faith" to believe that God has preserved the original integrity and message of the Bible down through the ages. The "lower" textual criticism²⁵ done over the last several decades has given us overwhelming evidence that the relatively few errors which do exist in *copies* of the autographa—not the autographa itself which conservatives believe has no errors—have little if any bearing on Biblical doctrine. There is nothing about our salvation or the Christian life which is significantly affected by the discrepancies found in existing manuscripts. Henry stresses the success of modern textual criticism in harmonizing the existing copies of the original manuscripts with one another.

F. J. A. Hort's verdict remains timely, however, that "for practical purposes in the case of the New Testament, textual critics have been successful in restoring [the copies] to within 99.9% accuracy" and

²³ The following discussion draws heavily from Feinberg, pp. 299-300.

²⁴ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. IV, p. 76

²⁵ Lower textual criticism is done by linguistic scholars who study the existing copies of the autographa in an effort to determine the most accurate reading of the text to the best of their ability.

that “only about one word in every thousand has upon it substantial variation supported by such evidence as to call out the efforts of the critic in deciding the readings” (B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, “Introduction,” p. 2). According to Joseph P. Free this is the equivalent of about a half page in a five-hundred-page New Testament (*Archaeology and Bible History*, pp. 4-5). And Bruce writes that the “variant readings about which any doubt remains...affect no material question of historic fact or of Christian faith and practice” (*The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* pp. 19-20). Whatever uncertainties copying has contributed, the Bible remains virtually unchanged and its teaching undimmed. The text of the Old and New Testaments alike has been preserved even in the copies in remarkably pure form.

Not a single article of faith, not a single moral precept is in doubt. Those who make an issue of snake-handling or drinking deadly poison miss the point; this passage falls within the disputed ending of Mark’s Gospel [16: 9-20] and cannot be considered binding unless and until better manuscript evidence is found. Curiously, those who appeal to the passage to encourage the handling of poisonous snakes as evidence of faith’s power are seldom as inclined to drink deadly poison!²⁶

In other words, when we compare the existing copies of the autographa with one another—numbering over 5,700 for the NT—there are only a few differences, none of which would be substantial. However, it is important for us to understand that inerrancy does not apply to different *copies* of the autographa; much less does it apply to different *translations* of the Bible which are taken from the copies. Therefore, when ten different English translations of the same verse use different words, we must not assume errors in the Bible, but different ways of translating the Greek or Hebrew words into English. Furthermore, different translations of the Bible have used multiple copies of the autographa which differ from one another on *minor* points.

Since the King James Bible was translated from the Greek and Hebrew in 1611, other copies of the autographa have been found which are older than the *Textus Receptus* used in translating the King James Version. Many modern evangelical scholars believe that the translations of the Bible since 1611 are superior in quality because they are based on better manuscripts, but there is still disagreement.²⁷ On the other hand, if we believed that all the copies of the autographa were inspired, we would have the embarrassing problem of accounting for the fact that the inspired copies differed from one another—a problem which could call into question the whole doctrine of the divine inspiration of the Bible.

Frame has offered a helpful qualification by saying that the most important thing is not the autograph itself but the autographic text. It is true that we do not have any of the original autographs, yet we do have the autographic text which has been well-preserved—though not perfectly preserved—in multiple copies of the original autograph. In other words, we possess the autographic text in accurate copies of the autograph. The reason we can be confident of this fact is that through the science of textual criticism (see Henry’s quote of F.J.A. Hort above) scholars can discover the likely places where imperfect copying took place. “Where there is no evidence of textual corruption, we are quite within our rights to assume that our present text is autographic and

²⁶ Henry, pp. 235-236).

²⁷ Henry, p. 235

therefore to appeal to the text as the inerrant Word of God—just as Jesus and the apostles appealed to copies and versions of their day.”²⁸

...to cite a copy, when the copy is accurate, does not violate the sole authority of the autographic text....Insofar as their [Jesus', the apostles', and NT writers'] quotation reproduces the content of the Hebrew autographic text, it is true and authoritative....When Jesus and the apostles quote the OT using the LXX version [the Greek translation of the OT], their intent is not to assert the authority of the LXX as a translation, but to quote what is said in the OT autographic text. The LXX is only a vehicle for accomplishing that, a good means of communication to people who know the Scripture primarily through the LXX.²⁹

Textual criticism done over the last several decades overwhelmingly inspires our confidence in the copies of the original Scriptures. As noted above, there is internal evidence within the message of the Bible itself supporting the claim that we have in the copies themselves the very Word of God—the autographic text. Greg Bahnsen demonstrates that Jesus and the biblical writers embraced the authority of copies of the autographa although the autographa itself was not available for comparison. Copies of the Law of Moses were made of the original Law and were read by the kings of Israel to prevent apostasy.

"Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests.¹⁹ "It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, (Deut. 17:18-19 NASB)

It was never assumed by anyone that since these copies were not the original, they could not authoritatively and accurately reflect the will of God (1Kings 2: 3). Proverbs 25 is specifically identified as a copy of the proverbs of Solomon transcribed during the days of King Hezekiah (Prov. 25: 1).³⁰

These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, transcribed. (Prov. 25:1 NASB)

After reading from the copied scrolls of Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus asserted, **“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”** (Luke 4: 21). Jesus’ confidence in the text is never qualified, as if to say, “Of course, you know that what I read was merely a copy of the book of Isaiah and not the original manuscript.” On a number of occasions Jesus challenges his opponents by directing them to the Scriptures, knowing full well that they could only access the copies and not the originals (Matt. 12: 3, 5; 21: 16, 42; Lk. 10: 26). And never once did the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were experts in the Law of Moses, object that Jesus’ arguments were not substantial since He could cite only the copies. It is a notable fact of history that there was never any heretical controversy within the professing church over the inspiration and authority of Scripture from the apostolic age until the nineteenth century³¹ during which the historical

²⁸ Frame, *DWG*, p. 247

²⁹ Frame, *DWG*, pp. 244-245; words in brackets mine

³⁰ Bahnsen, “The Inerrancy of the Autographa”, *Inerrancy*, Geisler, ed., pp. 159-171

³¹ Henry, p. 76

methodology of higher critics, guided by evolutionary theory, began to reconstruct the OT according to evolutionary assumptions. Thus began the revolutionary JEDP theory—Jahwist, Eloist, Deuteronomist, and Priestly—which reconstructed the Pentateuch to prove the gradual progression of Israel’s worship from polytheism to henotheism (one primary god among many) and finally to monotheism. The theory was debunked (proven false) a long time ago, but it still lingers in the minds of some who still can’t get over the fact that Moses alone wrote the Pentateuch.³²

When confronted with Satan’s temptation in the wilderness, Jesus always countered with **“It is written”** (Matt. 4: 4, 7, 10). The verb tense is perfect, denoting action in the past with continuing results in the present, results which in this case were not affected by the fact that the OT quotations He cites were available only in copies. As Wenham notes, “There is a grand and solid objectivity about the perfect tense.... ‘Here,’ Jesus was saying, ‘is the permanent, unchangeable witness of the eternal God, committed to writing for our instruction.’”³³ Henry concurs by saying, “The force of the perfect tense (Matt. 4: 4) is that God’s providence preserves the *unbroken authority* of the copies.”³⁴ Speaking of the formula, **“It is written”** in Matt. 4, Bahnsen explains,

This form (the perfect tense) appears at least seventy-three times in the Gospels alone. It signifies that something has been established, accomplished, or completed and that it continues to be so or to have enduring effect. “It stands written” expresses the truth that what has been written in the original Scripture ***remains so written in the present copies***. Conversely, that to which the writer appeals in the present copies of the Scripture as normative is so because it is taken to be the ***enduring witness*** of the autographic text.³⁵

When the resurrected Lord confronted two of his despairing disciples on the road to Emmaus, He chastised them for failing to believe the prophetic witness of the OT. **Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures** (Luke 24:27 NASB). Again, Jesus never once questioned the validity and authority of the extant (existing) copies of the Scriptures available to His generation. He referred to them continuously throughout His ministry without the slightest degree of depreciation as copies and not originals.

Because Christ raised no doubts about the adequacy of the Scriptures as His contemporaries knew them, we can safely assume that the first-century text of the Old Testament was a wholly adequate representation of the divine word originally given. Jesus regarded the extant copies of His day as so approximate to the originals in their message that He appealed to those copies as authoritative. The respect that Jesus and His apostles held for the extant [existing] Old Testament text is, at base, an expression of their confidence in God’s providential preservation of the copies and translations as substantially identical with the inspired originals...The fact is that, although present copies and translations had a practical authority and adequacy for the purposes of divine revelation, the Bible evidences a pervasive concern to ***tether [tie together] current copies to the autographical text...***

³² For those who want to pursue the subject, you may visit creation.com website.

³³ Wenham, “Christ’s View of Scripture”, *Inerrancy*, Geisler, ed., p. 15

³⁴ Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, “The Infallibility of the Copies”, p. 230, emphasis mine

³⁵ Bahnsen, p. 169, emphasis mine

Present copies function authoritatively because they are viewed as reflecting the autographa correctly....

Jesus taught that we are to live by “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4: 4), thus tethering the authority of the Scriptures in hand to the original utterance given by divine inspiration. What people read as “Scripture” in the books of Moses was thought of as “spoken unto them by God” (Matt. 22: 29-32; Mark 12: 24-26)....In each case the autographical text is assumed to be present in the extant copy that is consulted.³⁶

Christ’s confidence in the copies of the autographa was also shared by other NT writers. Peter assured his readers that the prophetic witness of the OT was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.¹⁷ For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased”—¹⁸ and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.¹⁹ So we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.²⁰ But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one’s own interpretation,²¹ **for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.** (2 Pet. 1:16-21 NASB)

Peter was sure that the copies of the OT—the only Scriptures that were available to him—reliably communicated the very same message originally given by the Spirit to the prophets. Two interpretations of this text are possible. On the one hand, the **prophetic word** of the OT prophets is made **more sure** because of the eye-witness testimonies of Jesus’ messianic glory on the mount of transfiguration, the revelation to which Peter refers (cf. Matt. 17). Alternatively, Peter could be saying that the prophetic word is even more sure than the eye-witness testimonies. That is, the prophecies of the OT provided more proof that Jesus was the promised Messiah than the visible manifestation received on the mountain could provide. Commenting on 2 Pet. 1:19, Barnes says,

The *point* to which the prophecies related, and to which Peter referred, was the great doctrine respecting the coming of the Messiah, embracing perhaps all that pertained to his work, or all that he designed to do by his advent. They had had one illustrious proof respecting his advent as a glorious Saviour by his transfiguration on the mount; and the apostle here says that the prophecies abounded with truths on these points, and that they ought to give earnest heed to the disclosures which they made, and to compare them diligently with facts as they occurred, that they might be confirmed more and more in the truth. If, however, as the more obvious sense of this passage seems to be...it means that the prophecy was more sure, more steadfast, more to be depended on than even what the three disciples had seen and heard in the mount of transfiguration, this may be regarded as true in the following respects: (1.) The prophecies are *numerous*, and by their number they furnish a stronger proof than could be afforded by a single manifestation, however clear and glorious. (2.) They were *recorded*, and might be the subject of careful comparison with the events as they occurred. (3.) They were written long beforehand, and it could not be urged that the testimony which the prophets bore was owing to any illusion on their minds, or to any agreement among the different writers to impose on the world...

³⁶Bahnsen, “The Inerrancy of the Autographa”, Geisler, *Inerrancy*, ed. pp. 161-163, emphasis his

[On the other hand, the apostles Peter, James, and John could have been accused of “seeing things” on the mountain which they did not really see, thus creating the “Jesus myth” that modern liberal scholars enjoy talking about; e.g., Albert Schweitzer’s *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* in which he attempts to debunk the gospel accounts of Jesus as myths created to establish the Jesus “cult” or more recent attempts in “The Jesus Seminar”. Any documentary concerning the life of Jesus pushed by BBC, CNN, or other far left news media should be suspected of distorting the facts. D.M.] Continuing with Barnes,

Even supposing that there was a miracle in the case, the evidence of the prophecies, embracing many points in the same general subject, and extending through a long series of years, would be more satisfactory than any single miracle whatever.³⁷

Barnes is not saying that the transfiguration was not miraculous; he is saying that even this miraculous event is not more convincing of Jesus’ identity than hundreds of years of OT prophecy.

Frame makes the point that in their last letters both Peter and Paul were aware that their time on this earth was soon to end, and they wished their disciples to ground their confidence not on the memory of their experiences (Peter’s on the mountain and Paul’s on the road to Damascus) but on the enduring word of God. Memories of their eye-witness testimonies would fade, but the written word of God would endure forever.³⁸ Of course, both Peter’s eye-witness testimony and Paul’s would later become the enduring written word of God as the church accepted their writings as such.

It is likely that the copies of the OT which Timothy had read as a youth were not Hebrew copies but Greek copies known as the Septuagint. His father was Greek (Acts 16: 1) which makes it probable that Greek was his first language and the language of his education. Still, these Greek copies of the OT were sufficient in Paul’s eyes to give Timothy **the wisdom that leads to salvation** and were **profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness...** (2 Tim. 3: 15-16). They were “theopneustos”, “God-breathed”.

In 1 Cor. 10, Paul warned his readers that they should be careful to avoid the fatal errors of ancient Israel in its wilderness wanderings and says,

Now these things happened to them as an example, and **they were written for our instruction**, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (1 Cor. 10:11 NASB)

It is evident that Paul believed the actual events of Israel’s history were preserved accurately in the copies of the OT and were available to the Corinthian church for their **instruction**. J. I. Packer notes,

If God gave the Scriptures for a practical purpose—to make men wise unto salvation through faith in Christ—it is a safe inference [assumption] that He never permits them to become so corrupted that they can no longer fulfill it. It is noteworthy that the New Testament men did not hesitate to trust the words of the Old Testament as they had it, as a reliable indication of the mind of God. This attitude of

³⁷ Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes*, p. 230, emphasis mine.

³⁸ Frame, *DWG*, pp. 124-127.

faith in the adequacy of the text is confirmed, as far as it can be, by the unanimous verdict of textual scholars that the biblical manuscripts are excellently preserved; and no point of doctrine depends on any of the small number of cases in which the true reading remains doubtful.³⁹

3. Proper hermeneutics is essential for the doctrine of inerrancy.

Many accusations against the doctrine of inerrancy have been made by those who do not properly apply sound Biblical hermeneutics (principles used in the interpretation of Scripture). Although the Bible is wholly inerrant and infallible, man's ability to interpret the Bible is not. Sometimes different passages of the Bible have appeared to contradict one another when the real problem was the inability of the interpreter to discern the proper meaning and harmony of the different texts. If the interpretation of a text is in harmony with what the Bible teaches elsewhere, this interpretation is to be preferred over an interpretation which is out of harmony with the rest of the Bible.

When we are reading literary works other than the Bible, it is a matter of courtesy to the author to attempt to harmonize a difficult passage with what he has written elsewhere rather than accuse him of inconsistency—the benefit of the “second glance”. How much more should we attempt to discern the harmony of Scripture than to jump to unfounded conclusions when we read passages which appear inconsistent with others. Such unjustifiable conclusions have been the history of what is known as “higher criticism” in which the consistency of the Bible has been subjected to the judgment of men who attempt to discern which parts of the Bible are reliable and which are not on the basis of arbitrary and unproven criteria (requirements). In such a scenario, it is not the Bible which is the final authority but man's reason.

Examples of Supposed “Inconsistencies” in the Bible

a. The synoptic gospels.

I have already covered the two accounts of the demoniacs in Decapolis. There are also two different accounts of Judas' death which need reconciliation.

And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself. (Matt. 27:5 NASB)

(Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out. (Acts 1:18 NASB)

The likely explanation for the discrepancy is as follows: Judas hanged himself on a tree overhanging a large cliff. After some undisclosed time, the tree branch broke, and Judas' body (possibly in the state of decomposition) fell many feet to the valley below, possibly hitting a large rock causing severe trauma to the lower abdomen. There may be other plausible explanations to solve the seeming inconsistency, but if only one explanation is plausible, the Bible cannot be accused of inconsistency.

³⁹ J.I. Packer, quoted by René Pache, p. 138, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*.

Evangelical writers have often said that although there are many Bible difficulties, nobody has ever proved the existence of a single error. This is true. It takes only a *possible* solution to a problem to refute the dogmatic assertion that there is *no* solution, that is, that the problem amounts to an error. But more profoundly: no problem has such weight as to overturn the fundamental premise of Christian epistemology: that the Bible is God's permanent personal word, given to us to be believed and obeyed.⁴⁰

There is a seeming discrepancy concerning the events surrounding Jesus' trial.

So the *Roman* cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, ¹³ **and led Him to Annas first**; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. (Jn. 18:12-13 NASB)

Those who had seized Jesus **led Him away to Caiaphas**, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. (Matt. 26:57 NASB)

Was Jesus led to Annas or Caiaphas? Both. Since Annas was Caiaphas' father-in-law, it is possible that they lived in the same housing compound. Besides, although Annas was no longer high priest, he was still the power behind the high priesthood until his death.

b. Kings and Chronicles

In my notes on "Interpreting OT Narratives", I give the example of how the writers of Kings and Chronicles deal with the ascendancy of Solomon to the throne of Israel. Notice the following verses:

And Solomon sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established. (1 Ki. 2:12 NASB)

Now Solomon the son of David established himself securely over his kingdom, and the LORD his God *was* with him and exalted him greatly. (2 Chr. 1:1 NASB)

You would think that the stories in Kings and Chronicles would be unnecessarily repetitive until you actually read the stories. In Kings, Solomon's kingdom is far from secure near the end of David's life. Adonijah, Solomon's half-brother, attempts to steal the kingdom away from Solomon and almost succeeds except for the intervention of Bathsheba and Nathan the prophet (1 Kings 1). Later on, he must eliminate some of those who had opposed him and his father David, even Adonijah who makes one more attempt to usurp the kingdom by acquiring Abishag (1 Kings 2). However, in 1 Chronicles 28-29 and 2 Chronicles 1, the author presents Solomon's ascent to the throne as a smooth and trouble-free transition with David announcing beforehand that God had chosen Solomon as king after him and had commissioned Solomon to build the temple. Quite a different story.

Which account is true? Both are true, but the authors had different purposes in mind for writing the story. The author of Kings wished to show that Solomon's kingdom would be secure only with

⁴⁰ Frame, *DWG*, p. 184, emphasis his.

His providential intervention and only if Solomon remained faithful to the covenant—which he failed to do with his many foreign wives and idol temples (1 Kings 11). At the end of Kings, Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed, and the remainder of Judah is taken into exile. (Although a word of hope is inserted at the very end with Jehoiachin restored to favor with Evil-merodach, king of Babylon.) The writer of Chronicles wished to prepare the exiled community in Babylon under Persian rule for their return to the Promised Land and their task of rebuilding the temple. Thus, there was no need for him to repeat the difficulties of Solomon’s inauguration as king or his subsequent failures, facts already known from Kings.⁴¹ 2 Chronicles ends with Cyrus’ decree to rebuild the temple and allow any Israelite who wished to return to Jerusalem.

c. Pauline epistles

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

²¹ **For even though they knew [ginōskō] God**, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Rom. 1:20-21 NASB)

For since in the wisdom of God **the world through its wisdom did not come to know [ginōskō] God**, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. (1 Cor. 1:21 NASB)

So which is it? Did men **know** (*ginōskō*) God or did they **not know** (*ginōskō*) God? Paul appears to be contradicting himself: Men **knew** God through creation, rendering them **without excuse**, but then he says in Corinthians that they **did not** come to **know God**. The word **know** is *ginōskō* in both verses, but just because the Greek word is the same does not necessarily mean that it means the same thing in both texts. The context in Romans 1 and 1 Cor. 1 is different. In Romans 1, Paul says that there was (and is) enough evidence in the created world (general revelation) to know the true God and to bring men to **honor Him** and **give thanks** to Him. The problem is not lack of evidence, but man’s sinfulness. Rather than honoring God and thanking Him for life and His glorious creation, men instead become **futile in their speculations** (reasoning), thus inclining them to worship the things God had made. They know many things about God, including His **eternal power and divine nature**, but that knowledge did not (and does not today) lead them to **know** God in a saving, personal way leading them to worship Him.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul says that men could not come to a saving knowledge of God through empirical observation of the creation or through human speculation. In God’s infinite **wisdom**, He chose not to allow anyone to **know** Him personally and savingly through human wisdom or effort. To allow men to **know Him** in this manner would have produced the very thing God wished to destroy, human pride. Instead, he presented men with the “foolish” message of the gospel, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (v. 23), to show that God’s **foolishness is wiser** than man’s wisdom (v. 25).

Thus, Paul is not using the word **know** (*ginōskō*) in the same sense or with respect to the same thing in Rom. 1 and 1 Cor. 1. To know God’s invisible attributes and to know God personally unto

⁴¹ Richard Pratt, *1 and 2 Chronicles*.

salvation are two different things. Therefore, it is possible for men to know God and not to know God at the same time.⁴²

So we see that many of the alleged contradictions and inconsistencies in the Bible may be solved through careful exegesis of the texts. But what happens when there seems to be no explanation? Frame answers,

So the question is this: in the face of *alleged* contradiction, whom do we believe? God, who addresses us with his personal word, or some Bible critic, who believes, but cannot prove, that the text is contradictory? To those committed above all to obeying God's personal words, the answer to this question is obvious.⁴³

A related question is whether Christians should always remain in a state of fear that some scientist, archeologist, theologian, or philosopher will one day come up with some new discovery or argument which disproves the inerrancy of the Bible or the existence of God. To this I say, "Fear not." Every fact of the universe cries out for the existence of God⁴⁴ and the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible. Nothing will ever be discovered to refute this, although many have tried and will continue to try.

Most of the time, the well-known public skeptics like Carl Sagan simply wish to spout off their opinions without any definitive evidence for their claims. His introduction for all his TV appearances was, "The cosmos is all there is, ever was, or ever will be." In other words, there is no God so quit looking for Him. But this is merely a metaphysical opinion, not proof. All metaphysical questions ("meta" beyond, and "physical", the physical universe) are beyond physical, empirical proof; but atheists continue to repeat the same mantras to convince themselves and others that they have said something profound. Sagan's mantra quoted above is only an opinion or wish. He wished it were true that only the cosmos existed, but he knew in his hardened heart that it wasn't true (Rom. 1).

4. Inerrancy distinguishes between what the Scripture writers merely describe and what they intend to teach as normative or moral.

In 1 Samuel 28, King Saul employed the help of a medium to communicate with the prophet Samuel who had already died. In this case, the Scripture writer clearly describes the historical facts as they existed; he had no intention of teaching that communication with the spirits of the dead was permissible—something emphatically denied in Dt. 18: 9-11 and, ironically, enforced by Saul himself (1 Sam. 28: 9).

"When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations.¹⁰ "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer,¹¹ or one who casts a spell, **or a medium**, or a spiritist, **or one who calls up the dead.** (Deut. 18:9-11 NASB)

⁴² See my notes on Romans 1 for a fuller explanation.

⁴³ Frame, *DWG*, p. 190, emphasis his.

⁴⁴ A statement derived from Cornelius Van Till.

Surprisingly, Saul was allowed to communicate with Samuel from the dead, but his message to Saul was not the blessing of guidance that Saul wished, but a curse predicting his death.

Biblical characters often engaged in deeds which were scandalous and immoral, even heroes of the faith like Abraham who lied twice about Sarah (Gen. 12, 20) and David who committed adultery and murder. However, such deeds merely describe what really happened without implying that they should have happened. They actually supply another reason that the Bible should be accepted as the word of God. Even redemptive history's most important figures like Abraham and David are not presented as perfect specimens of character, but as real people in need of God's grace.

III. What the Bible Says About Itself

Does the Bible really even claim to be the word of God? If not, then we are wasting our time defending it as such. But as it turns out, the Bible claims exactly that.

A. The O.T. Witness to Itself

A good place to start is with the Old Testament. Is there any evidence in the O.T. Scriptures that the writers and prophets were conscious of God's intervention in their lives and in the content of their message? The following passages indicate an affirmative answer.⁴⁵

1. The Biblical writers and prophets were aware of their direct calling from God and that God had spoken through them.

Moses is clearly aware that God has called him for the task of delivering the people of Israel from their Egyptian bondage. When reading this narrative, keep in mind that Moses is the author and is recounting what happened.

Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt."¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?"¹² And He said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain."¹³ Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?"¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, '**I AM has sent me to you.**'" (Exodus 3:10-14 NASB)

Moses was also aware that God had made him His mouthpiece of revelation to the Israelites, the first among many prophets provided to guide and direct Israel with the very words of God.

¹⁵"The LORD [*Yahweh*] your God will raise up for you a prophet **like me** [*i.e. like Moses*] from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. ¹⁶"This is according to all that you asked of the LORD [*Yahweh*] your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the

⁴⁵ Morton H. Smith, unpublished syllabus on Systematic Theology, vol. 1, pp. 69-70

voice of the LORD [*Yahweh*] my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.¹⁷ "The LORD [*Yahweh*] said to me, 'They have spoken well.¹⁸ 'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen **like you** [*i.e. like Moses*], and **I will put My words in his mouth**, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.¹⁹ 'It shall come about that whoever will not listen to **My words** which he shall speak **in My name**, I Myself will require *it* of him. (Deut. 18:15-19 NASB)

Note the repetition of **My words** which are placed **in the mouth** of God's prophet and spoken in **My name**, *i.e.* the name of *Yahweh*, as well as the words **like me** and **like you** referring to Moses. How did God confirm that the prophet was speaking His words and not the prophet's own words?

"You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?'²² "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, **if the thing does not come about or come true**, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. (Deut. 18:21-22 NASB)

An omniscient God cannot make mistakes in His predictions, therefore the prophet who is speaking God's words must always be—not sometimes—accurate in his predictions of the future. But what if a prophet's prediction comes true along with an encouragement to go after other gods—*i.e.*, an encouragement to violate a previous word from God, namely, **You shall have no other gods before me** (Ex. 20: 3)?

"If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you **and gives you a sign or a wonder**,² **and the sign or the wonder comes true**, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, '**Let us go after other gods** (whom you have not known) **and let us serve them**,'³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; **for the LORD your God is testing you** to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deut. 13:1-3 NASB)

Implicitly, polytheism—the worship of more than one god—is condemned, for God will not allow their loyalty and love for Him to be divided among many gods. In this scenario, the Lord is **testing** His people to see if His previous word in the Decalogue is more authoritative for life than the present empirical (seen and heard) evidence of miracles. Surely if genuine miracles are performed, this is a sign that the prophet is true, according to Deut. 18: 22! Not so, for it ignores the first test of the prophet, namely, his prophecy must be consistent with the word of God known at that time, the Law of God in Exodus.

Moses is asking, is their loyalty to *Yahweh* steadfast, or may it be easily shifted to another deity if there is enough "evidence" contrary to the word of God to do so? This is essentially the same question I posed earlier. Are we afraid that some evidence will be found that disproves the word of God or the very existence of God? Is it possible that any such evidence will one day be found? The answer is no, but the 19th and 20th centuries have seen this shift of allegiance by many professing Christians who have lost their faith in a Creator God due to the alleged scientific proof of evolution. There is no need, they now believe, for an all-powerful God against the overwhelming evidence for self-existent, all-powerful, energized matter which evolves into every form of physical life—the miracle of nature.

The "signs and wonders" of energized matter have spoken through the modern "prophets" of science who say, "There is no God," which eventually merges into the belief that the most

intelligent form of natural life, man, is god. This, in turn, moves full circle back to the pagan belief that nature is god and that the planet should be depopulated of most humans to minimize human impact and save the planet. (Thus far, no environmentalist-save-the-planet-priests have volunteered to be exterminated for the sake of minimizing human impact upon a fragile planet teetering on the edge of destruction by an additional 1.5 degrees Centigrade increase in temperature in 100 years.) Thus, the rationalism of modern science merges into the irrationalism of the depopulation agenda.⁴⁶

Getting back to biblical examples, Jesus warned the disciples that real miracles would be performed by those with satanic power which would mislead even the elect if this were possible.

"For false Christs and false prophets will arise **and will show great signs and wonders**, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. (Matt. 24:24 NASB)

Likewise, Paul warns,

Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming;⁹ *that is*, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, **with all power and signs and false wonders**,¹⁰ and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. (2 Thess. 2:8-10 NASB)

The **wonders** are **false** not because they are fake—although most, if not all, are fake in our day—but because they deceive. They lead people to worship a false god, symbolized in Revelation as the **beast coming up out of the sea** who is given authority from the **dragon**, Satan himself (Rev. 13: 1).

The confirmation of Samuel as a prophet was self-attesting, i.e. evident to everyone.

All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD. (1 Samuel 3:20 NASB)

The calling of Isaiah was so vivid that he made note of the year in which it happened.

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. (Isaiah 6:1 NASB)

Jeremiah was certain that the Lord had called him. Other OT prophets were also convinced of their calling and also the message God had given them to deliver. The phrase, "**Thus says the Lord**" occurs 416 times in the OT.

Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." (Jeremiah 1:4-5 NASB)

⁴⁶ Those interested in climate change hysteria should read Bjorn Borg, *False Alarm* and Alex Epstein, *Fossil Future*.

The word of the LORD came to me saying, "What do you see, Jeremiah?" And I said, "I see a rod of an almond tree."¹² **Then the LORD said to me**, "You have seen well, for I am watching over My word to perform it."¹³ **The word of the LORD came to me** a second time saying, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see a boiling pot, facing away from the north."¹⁴ **Then the LORD said to me**, "Out of the north the evil will break forth on all the inhabitants of the land."¹⁵ "For, behold, I am calling all the families of the kingdoms of the north," **declares the LORD**; "and they will come and they will set each one his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all its walls round about and against all the cities of Judah."¹⁶ "I will pronounce My judgments on them concerning all their wickedness, whereby they have forsaken Me and have offered sacrifices to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands."¹⁷ "Now, gird up your loins and arise, and speak to them all which I command you. Do not be dismayed before them, or I will dismay you before them."¹⁸ "Now behold, I have made you today as a fortified city and as a pillar of iron and as walls of bronze against the whole land, to the kings of Judah, to its princes, to its priests and to the people of the land."¹⁹ "They will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you," **declares the LORD**. **Now the word of the LORD came to me** saying, (Jeremiah 1:11—2: 1 NASB)

In this passage, notice the number of times we see the following phrases: **to whom the word of the Lord came**; **Now the word of the Lord came to me saying...**; and **the Lord said to me...; declares the Lord**.⁴⁷

In the prophecy of Ezekiel alone, the phrase, "the word of the Lord came to me" occurs 46 times and in the prophecy of Jeremiah, 9 times.

2. The true prophets of the Lord were aware of the presence of false prophets who claimed to be sent by God but were not.

Then the LORD said to me, "The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. **I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them**; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds. (Jeremiah 14:14 NASB)

"I did not send these prophets, But they ran. I did not speak to them, But they prophesied. (Jeremiah 23:21 NASB)

"Behold, I am against those who have prophesied false dreams," declares the LORD, "and related them and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting; yet **I did not send them** or command them, nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit," declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 23:32 NASB)

"For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Do not let your prophets who are in your midst and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream.'⁹ 'For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; **I have not sent them**,' declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 29:8-9 NASB)

"They see falsehood and lying divination who are saying, 'The LORD declares,' **when the LORD has not sent them**; yet they hope for the fulfillment of *their* word. (Ezekiel 13:6 NASB)

⁴⁷See also Hosea 1: 2, 4, 9; 3: 1; Hab. 2: 1-2; Zech. 1: 1, 7; Haggai 1: 1, 7; 2: 1, 10, 20; Micah 1: 1; 3: 5; 2 Sam. 12: 7,11; 1 Kings 18: 1; 19: 9; 2 Kings 20: 4. This is only a small sampling of such texts.

The repetitive phrase, “**I did not send them**” is haunting. How many so-called prophets and preachers do we have in our day whom the Lord has not sent?

Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men; Her priests have profaned the sanctuary. They have done violence to the law. (Zephaniah 3:4 NASB)

In 1 Kings 22 there is a very interesting (and somewhat humorous) story of the false prophets during the kingdoms of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and Ahab, king of Israel. When the true prophet of the Lord, Micaiah, is summoned to appear before the kings, he is encouraged to make his prophecy agreeable to that of everyone else who assured the kings of victory (v.13). In other words, it was customary for the false prophets, who were paid by the king, to simply tell him what he wanted to hear in the first place. Thus, the messenger summoning Micaiah didn't want him to “rock the boat” but go along with the other prophets. Part of their reasoning was the pagan notion that if the prophets were unanimous, they could manipulate the gods to do their bidding.

At first he sarcastically prophesied as he had been told and gave a favorable report, knowing full well that Ahab, a thoroughly wicked king about whom he could never say anything good, would know that Micaiah was simply mocking him and his worthless prophets. Micaiah and Ahab had had such exchange of words before. When Ahab protested his sarcasm, Micaiah said, “**I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains like sheep which have no shepherd.**” This didn't please Ahab any better, and he had Micaiah locked up in prison until he returned safely from battle. Micaiah replied, “**If you indeed return safely the Lord has not spoken by me. Listen, all you people**” (v. 28). True to his prophecy, Ahab did not return safely from battle, being killed by an arrow shot at random and striking Ahab in a small place where pieces of his armor joined together.

The story is a vivid illustration of the differences between false and true prophets in the history of Israel. The false prophet had to keep his job and protect his head from arrogant kings who didn't like bad news or those who brought it; thus, they were disposed to telling him only good news. They were the ancient “spin doctors” (forerunners of the “yes” men who assist modern politicians) who were skillful at weaving a lie which was at least remotely believable. The true prophet, on the other hand, was simply God's mailman. He made no effort to edit the message God had sent to His people; he existed simply to deliver the mail as received: “**Thus says the Lord.**”

The story is also an illustration of what a true preacher of the word ought to be, or ought not to be. He is not preaching to earn his salary or endear people to him by telling them what he knows they want to hear. He is preaching as God's mailman, delivering the message of God from the Bible as accurately as he can with its blessing or curse, whichever the case may be.

B. What Christ Said about the Old Testament

Now that we have seen what the OT says about itself, we may turn to the witness of Jesus Christ to the OT.⁴⁸

1. Jesus regarded the historical narratives as records of fact, not fiction.

⁴⁸ For a thorough treatment of this subject, the student is encouraged to read the chapter, “Christ's View of Scripture”, by John W. Wenham in *Inerrancy*, pp. 3-36, from which much of the following discussion is drawn.

As far as Jesus was concerned, the OT historical narratives were straightforward records of fact. The passages we could cite are too numerous to mention, but the following are instructive for our purposes:

"For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they will kill and *some* they will persecute,'⁵⁰ so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation,⁵¹ **from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah**, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.'" (Luke 11:49-51 NASB)

"For the coming of the Son of Man will be **just like the days of Noah**."³⁸ "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,³⁹ and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be." (Matthew 24:37-39 NASB)

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad." (John 8:56 NASB)

"And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in **Sodom** which occurred in you, **it would have remained to this day**."²⁴ "Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in *the* day of judgment, than for you." (Matt. 11:23-24 NASB)

"It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building;²⁹ but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all."³⁰ "It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed."³¹ "On that day, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house must not go down to take them out; and likewise the one who is in the field must not turn back."³² "Remember Lot's wife." (Luke 17:28-32 NASB)

"I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline *at the table* with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven;¹² but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 8:11-12 NASB)

"Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'"³² Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven." (John 6:31-32 NASB)

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (John 3:14 NASB)

And He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry;²⁶ how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar *the* high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for *anyone* to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?" (Mark 2:25-26 NASB)

"And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil

nor do they spin,²⁹ yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. (Matthew 6:28-29 NASB)

"But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land;²⁶ and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, *in the land* of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.²⁷ "And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." (Luke 4:25-27 NASB)

But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet;⁴⁰ for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.⁴¹ "The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here." (Matthew 12:39-41 NASB)

And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE,⁵ and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH '? (Matthew 19:4-5 NASB)

What we should notice about some of these texts is that those parts of the OT most embarrassing to the modern mind—particularly many modern theologians teaching in mainline seminaries—are the ones Jesus preferred to quote. He upheld the historical account of the creation of Adam and Eve. He believed the witness of the OT prophets including the stories of Elijah's deliverance of the widow of Zarephath and Elisha's healing of Naaman. What's more, He cited the story of Jonah and the fish which He interpreted as factual. It is surely curious to think that Jesus would use the fictitious stories of Jonah and Sodom and Gomorrah as stern warnings to unbelieving Jews who will one day stand in judgment. Wenham's quotation of T. T. Perowne puts the matter of Jonah in proper perspective.

Is it possible to understand a reference like this [Matt. 12: 41] on the non-historic theory of the book of Jonah? The future Judge is speaking words of solemn warning to those who shall hereafter stand convicted at his bar. Intensely real he would make the scene in anticipation to them, as it was real, as if then present, to himself. And yet we are to suppose him to say that *imaginary* persons who at the *imaginary* preaching of an *imaginary* prophet repented in *imagination*, shall rise up in that day and condemn the *actual* impenitence of those his *actual* hearers.⁴⁹

Another similar example is the factuality of a world-wide flood casually dismissed by liberal theologians of the last two centuries who could not, and will not, believe that a flood of this proportion is possible—but neither did Noah's contemporaries. Even many current evangelicals believe it was only a local flood. Yet, Jesus uses the story unapologetically as a factual account of how God destroyed the world because of sin and will do so again.

⁴⁹ John W. Wenham, *Inerrancy*, Geisler, ed., p. 8, emphasis mine.

"For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah.³⁸ "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,³⁹ and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; **so will the coming of the Son of Man be.** (Matt. 24:37-39 NASB)

Jesus was not contradicting God's promise not to destroy the world with a flood, but only warning that a second destruction of the world is inevitable at His second coming. Now, if the cosmic flood was considered only a mythological story by the time of the first century, one that the Jews no longer interpreted historically, Jesus was surely mistaken to use it as type of the coming judgment. It is clear from His use of it that His hearers accepted the story as authoritative, literal history. Analogously, if it was only a local flood, then the final destruction would also be local, rendering both Jesus' and Peter's warnings embarrassingly exaggerated (2 Pet. 2: 4-9). The reader will notice that Peter uses the same two examples, the world-wide flood and Sodom and Gomorrah, as proof of the coming judgment. Unlike Jesus, Peter was writing to displaced Christians, both Jewish and Gentile, **scattered** in various countries facing the derisive skepticism of those who denied the historicity of the flood and the coming judgment it typified.

⁴For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment;⁵ and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, **when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;**⁶ and **if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes,** having made them an example to those who would live ungodly *lives* thereafter;⁷ and *if* He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men⁸ (for by what he saw and heard *that* righteous man, while living among them, felt *his* righteous soul tormented day after day by *their* lawless deeds),⁹ *then* the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, (2 Pet. 2:4-9 NASB)

¹This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder,² that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles.³ Know this first of all, that in the last days **mockers will come with their mocking,** following after their own lusts,⁴ and saying, **"Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."**⁵ For when they maintain this, **it escapes their notice** that by the word of God *the* heavens existed long ago and *the* earth was formed out of water and by water,⁶ **through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.**⁷ **But by His word** the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, **kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.**⁸ But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.⁹ The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, **and the earth and its works will be burned up.**¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. (2 Pet. 3:1-13 NASB)

The day of the Lord or the day of God is no localized event but will encompass the earth even as the flood. Its purpose, as in the flood, is to cleanse the world of ungodly men and women and give the world a new beginning that will never end.

The same exegetical logic can be applied to Lot's wife (Lk.17:28-32). Did Jesus really believe God turned Lot's wife into a pillar of salt?

"It will be just the same **on the day that the Son of Man is revealed**.³¹ "On **that day**, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house must not go down to take them out; and likewise the one who is in the field must not turn back.³² "**Remember Lot's wife**.³³ "Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses *his life* will preserve it. (Lk. 17:30-33 NASB)

Without qualification, Jesus uses Lot's wife as an example of what not to do on **that day** when **the Son of Man is revealed**—don't turn back with longing in your heart for the old world corrupted by of sin. In this text and in Matthew 24, Jesus intertwines His second coming with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.⁵⁰ Whether one believes that the text refers to the second coming of Christ or only to the destruction of Jerusalem is immaterial for my purpose here. Why would Jesus use the mythological story of Lot's wife turning to a pillar of salt (Gen. 19: 26) to warn his audience about the necessity of perseverance in the face of persecution if this event never really happened? There are many mythological stories about the wrath of the Greek gods which no one, to my knowledge, takes seriously. But Jesus interprets the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as serious history.

Further, if Jesus' Jewish audience had believed the story to be only an OT myth, they would have mocked Him. Even if we believed, wrongly, that Jesus' primary audience consisted of ignorant, naïve fools incapable of critical thinking and socially conditioned to believe in myths, must we also admit either that Jesus was equally naïve and foolish or that He was blatantly deceptive? Many modern theologians don't seem to be troubled by the implications. Bahnsen notes the epistemological⁵¹ bias of many modern readers who assume the impossibility of miracles.

Miracles would indicate that there is a realm of inscrutable mystery for the (pretended) autonomy of man's mind. Miracles would testify to a transcendent and self-conscious Power in the universe which unbelievers find unnerving. So rather than examine whether miracles have in fact occurred or take seriously their reports and significance, it is better, thinks the unbeliever, to dismiss their possibility in advance.

So we will hear critics of Christianity say things like: "How can anybody with even a smattering of high school science believe that a virgin can conceive a child, a man can walk on water, a storm can be calmed upon command, the blind or lame can be instantly healed, or a dead corpse can resuscitate? The modern world knows better! The miracle-claims of Christianity are evidence of its irrationality and superstitious character." In the face of such ridicule and challenge, Christians sometimes cower in silence, when in fact it should be the critic who is intellectually ashamed—put to shame by his historical ignorance, as well as the logical defects in his thinking.

⁵⁰ See my "Synoptic Gospels" on Matthew 24.

⁵¹ Epistemology is the theory of knowing or the method by which one attains knowledge. Empiricists, for example, believe all knowledge must be gained from human experience, thus eliminating the possibility of miracles for those empiricists who have never personally seen a miracle.

You will notice in the hypothetical challenge to Christianity's credibility which is expressed above ...there is an unquestioned and arrogant assumption that a critical mindset about miracles is the exclusive property of "the modern world." The philosopher David Hume snidely remarked that it forms a strong presumption against all supernatural and miraculous relations that they are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations; or if a civilized people has ever given admission to any of them, that people will be found to have received them from ignorant and barbarous ancestors....

Over and over again you will find non-Christians who simply take it for granted that people in the ancient world believed miracles took place, to be blunt, because: (a) they were too scientifically stupid to know better, (b) they were gullible and naive, and/or (c) they were fascinated and eager to find anywhere they could traces of magic in their experience.

Of course, on those three scores we should wonder if the enlightened modern world has any reason for pride, really. It is not the least bit difficult today to locate scientifically stupid people, even college graduates. Watch them try to "fix" things with a hammer, deal with an unwanted cockroach or rationalize their smoking; listen to their home-cures for a hangover. And as for gullibility and magic! In our oh-so-smart "modern" world have you ever heard about get-rich-quick investment schemes, diet fads, lottery fever, or the wonder of crystals (or pyramids, etc.)?

Or listen to all those respected entertainers on TV talk-shows telling large, attentive audiences about their "former lives," or about the healing power of meditation, or about "social Karma" and "mother earth," or about the "human face" of communist tyranny in our century, etc. These are hardly evidences of a critical mind or superior rationality.⁵²

In Europe and America some people believe more ridiculous myths than the Greek gods, like the possibility of men becoming women capable of having babies and women becoming men—all based upon the miracle of science. Many modern scientists hold to the panspermia theory of human origins. Just get on the internet and type in "panspermia" or the question: Did human DNA come from space? You might get the following statement or something like it.

Meteorites could have been responsible for delivering the basis of life's genetic code. Analyses of three meteorites suggest that nucleobases, the crucial components of DNA, could have formed in space and then fallen to Earth to provide the raw material for the origin of life itself.⁵³

More believable than Noah's flood or Lot's wife? Yes, if you don't believe the Bible which has stood the test of criticism for 2000 years; but if you don't believe the word of God, you might end up believing almost anything.

In reality, the unbeliever's conclusion that miracles are impossible is contained in the premise of the unbeliever's argument.⁵⁴

⁵² Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready*; pp. 221-222.

⁵³ Natural History Museum, April 26, 2022

⁵⁴ *Always Ready*, p. 225.

First premise: Miracles never happen.

Second premise: Christianity claims the reality of past miracles.

Conclusion: Therefore, Christianity cannot be true.

Although the syllogism is logical, the first premise is false, making the concluding statement false. It is a classic example of begging the question: Miracles did not occur in ancient times because they could not occur. Moreover, Christianity cannot be true because Christianity asserts the reality of past miracles.

The overwhelming majority of Christians today do not believe that miracles are constantly occurring. That is why we call such unusual events “miracles”. I, for one, have never seen a miracle; yet I believe in the rarely mentioned miracles of the Bible scattered here and there in various epochs of salvation history: the creation of the world and its destruction by a world-wide flood in Genesis, the miracles of Moses and Joshua in the five books of Moses and Joshua, Samson, Jonah, Elijah and Elisha in 1 and 2 Kings, Daniel and his three friends exiled in Babylon, and Jesus (Gospels) and the apostles (Gospels and Acts). I can’t think of any other periods of miraculous events in the whole Bible. Even John the Baptist produced no miracles. Considering 4,000 years of salvation history, this is a fairly sparse recording of miraculous events. (However, there were many miraculous predictions made by the OT prophets hundreds of years in advance; and, of course, there are still future miraculous events to come which are recorded in Revelation.)

Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language (1980) defines “miracle” as

an event or action that apparently contradicts known scientific laws and is hence thought to be due to supernatural causes, esp. [especially] to an act of God.

According to this definition, miracles cannot be explained scientifically and are contrary to “known scientific laws”—events like people rising from the dead, sea waters rising in two parts and leaving a dry path in the middle, floating axes, people emerging alive from fiery furnaces, amputated ears growing back, etc. David Hume (who is now dead and a thorough-going believer in miracles) once called miracles “violations of the laws of nature”, denying their occurrence in the past or present.⁵⁵ The term “scientific law” has become a modern synonym for “God”, as if the laws of the nature—lovingly called “Mother Nature”—are sovereignly independent of supernatural power.

Christians, on the other hand, believe that Christ **upholds** [*present tense participle*] **all things by the word of His power** (Heb. 1: 3) and **in Him all things hold together** (Col. 1: 17). Nothing happens in the world apart from the ever-present, personal power of God executed through the second person of the godhead.

In Him [*Christ*] also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose **who works all things after the counsel of His will**, (Eph. 1:10b-11 NASB)

God the Father’s **purpose**, **counsel**, and **will** are mentioned in v. 11, but the Bible also teaches that the Father, Son, and Spirit always work together in coordination with one another both in the first

⁵⁵ Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, p. 246.

creation (the physical universe and the earth's inhabitants) and the second creation (spiritual life) in Christ. Thus, God in three persons causes **all things** to happen, including those ordinary things which people take for granted and attribute to “natural laws”: the birth of babies, hearts pumping blood to the rest of the body, old age, death, disease, cattle grazing, weather changes, electricity, rocks rolling downhill, fish feeding in the ocean, **all things**.⁵⁶

He sends forth springs in the valleys; They flow between the mountains;¹¹ They give drink to every beast of the field; The wild donkeys quench their thirst.¹² Beside them the birds of the heavens dwell; They lift up *their* voices among the branches.¹³ He waters the mountains from His upper chambers; The earth is satisfied with the fruit of His works.¹⁴ He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the labor of man, So that he may bring forth food from the earth,¹⁵ And wine which makes man's heart glad, So that he may make *his* face glisten with oil, And food which sustains man's heart.¹⁶ The trees of the LORD drink their fill, The cedars of Lebanon which He planted,¹⁷ Where the birds build their nests, *And* the stork, whose home is the fir trees.¹⁸ The high mountains are for the wild goats; The cliffs are a refuge for the shephanim.¹⁹ He made the moon for the seasons; The sun knows the place of its setting.²⁰ You appoint darkness and it becomes night, In which all the beasts of the forest prowl about.²¹ The young lions roar after their prey And seek their food from God.²² *When* the sun rises they withdraw And lie down in their dens.²³ Man goes forth to his work And to his labor until evening.²⁴ **O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all;** The earth is full of Your possessions.²⁵ There is the sea, great and broad, In which are swarms without number, Animals both small and great.²⁶ There the ships move along, *And* Leviathan, which You have formed to sport in it.²⁷ **They all wait for You To give them their food in due season.**²⁸ You give to them, they gather *it* up; You open Your hand, they are satisfied with good.²⁹ You hide Your face, they are dismayed; **You take away their spirit, they expire And return to their dust.**³⁰ You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; And You renew the face of the ground.³¹ Let the glory of the LORD endure forever; Let the LORD be glad in His works;³² He looks at the earth, and it trembles; He touches the mountains, and they smoke. (Ps. 104:10-32 NASB)

The eyes of all look to You, **And You give them their food in due time.**¹⁶ You open Your hand And satisfy the desire of every living thing. (Ps. 145:15-16 NASB)

The psalmists present the wonders of the “natural” world as products of the ever-present super-natural providence of God. Both domesticated and wild animals (**cattle and lions**) depend (**wait**) upon God for food. The **eyes** of every living inhabitant of the earth **look** to the Lord for sustenance. Nothing happens independently of God or by so-called “natural causes” operating on their own. People and animals do not die of natural causes, but because God placed a curse upon Adam and his descendants and subjected the animal world to the futility of Adam's sin (Gen. 3, Rom. 8). This curse is not natural, but supernatural. God is not a cosmic clock-maker who creates the world, sets it aside, and allows it to “run” on its own apart from His active involvement, either in blessing or curse. The “clock-maker” concept of God is a deistic interpretation contrary to the biblical idea of a personal God who is intimately involved with every person, thing, and event.

So then, everything going on in the world today is supernatural because the supernatural God causes it to happen. But not everything can be qualified as a “miracle”—**signs** (*oth*, Hebrew) or

⁵⁶ See Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, pp. 228-231, for an excellent treatment concerning the distinction between the miraculous and the ordinary.

wonders (*mopheth*, Hebrew), **miracle** (*dunamis* or *semeion*, Greek), or **wonders** (*teras*, Greek). I cannot deny that God performs miraculous events today somewhere in the world or that supernatural events have never occurred in human history other than those in the Bible. If they are occurring now, I find it curious that with the multiple means of communication throughout the world via the internet—and the modern smart phone to record them—we do not hear about or see these unequivocal (unquestionable) miraculous events. However, they could still be occurring in some very remote, primitive place in the world where the Christian gospel has only recently been revealed.

...we should not be skeptical about reports of spectacular miracles today. God may have his reasons for occasionally performing them.... there are tribes and nations to whom the gospel is new. It may very well be that when the gospel is brought to them, as in the book of Acts, God sometimes performs wonders to accredit his missionaries, to defeat opposition to the gospel, and to put the new church on a firm footing. Whether such events take place depends on God's sovereign purposes, not our theological generalizations.⁵⁷

Further, we have only a few equivocal (questionable or uncertain) records of such events in 2,000 years of church history or secular history. I must simply say, "I don't know", for I am not eternal, omnipresent, or omniscient—three requirements of anyone who claims that miracles cannot occur today nor have they ever occurred. This is equivalent to saying, "There is no God to make them occur." I am, however, amused at outlandish stories I sometimes see accidentally in the tabloid newspapers at sold at Walmart checkout counters in the US: "100-year-old woman gives birth to baby!" or other such nonsense. (Even after God's promise, Sarai was skeptical.) But what purpose would such a miracle have for the furthering of the gospel?

The real question is what was God's purpose for miraculous events in biblical history? I believe His purpose was the authentication of His word spoken through Moses and the prophets in the OT and Jesus and the apostles and prophets in the NT (e.g. Agabus; Acts 11: 28 and 21: 10).

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these **signs [oth]** of Mine among them,² and that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I performed My **signs [oth]** among them, **that you may know that I am the LORD.**" (Exod. 10:1-2 NASB)

Now the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, **that they may know that just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you.** (Jos. 3:7 NASB)

Then a man of God came near and spoke to the king of Israel and said, "Thus says the LORD, 'Because the Arameans have said, "The LORD is a god of *the* mountains, but He is not a god of *the* valleys," therefore I will give all this great multitude into your hand, and **you shall know that I am the LORD.**"' (1 Ki. 20:28 NASB)

"If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me;³⁸ but if I do them, **though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand** that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." (Jn. 10:37-38 NASB)

⁵⁷ Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, p. 265.

The **signs of a true apostle** were performed among you with all perseverance, by **signs** [*semeion*] and **wonders** [*teras*] and **miracles** [*dunamis*]. (2 Cor. 12:12 NASB)

We no longer need, nor should we require, such signs, wonders, and miracles today because we have in our possession the written word of God; and we can examine everything a preacher, teacher, or missionary says by this written word. I also think Christians who claim they are seeing miracles around every corner and under every tree are hurting their own witness and apologetic for Christianity. Apparently, continuing miracles are not necessary for our Christian apologetic or evangelism, and Jesus criticized the Jews for constantly requiring signs and wonders (Jn. 4: 48). Today, people continue believing in Christ without them simply because they believe the testimonies of the apostles and those who accompanied them. The written word of God by itself is its own best witness. But also, they observe the changed lives of people who become Christians, a greater miracle than Jonah.

In contrast, hundreds of thousands of Israelites perished in unbelief in the wilderness, many of them personal witnesses of the miracles of Moses. Thousands more perished in unbelief in Judea and Galilee after witnessing the miracles of Jesus. Judas, who walked with Jesus for three years and observed His life and miraculous works, eventually betrayed Him. Many Corinthians denied Paul's apostleship even though they had seen him perform signs, wonders, and miracles (2 Cor. 10-12). Demas, a personal disciple of Paul, abandons him and appears to have abandoned the faith altogether, **having loved this present world** (2 Tim. 4: 10). In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Abraham tells the rich man that if his brothers did not believe Moses and the prophets of the OT, neither would they believe if Lazarus, resurrected from the dead, appeared in their midst (Lk. 16). This was Jesus' warning to the Jews that they would not believe even after He rose from the dead. And they didn't. It takes more than external miracles to bring men to faith in Christ. The internal miracle of regeneration is essential.

When the Apostle Paul spoke of the resurrection on the Areopagus in Athens, some people mocked him with derision (Acts 17: 32).

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began to sneer*, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." (Acts 17:32 NASB)

Like any other culture, the ancient culture of Jesus and Paul was a mixture of vastly different kinds of people—those who were intelligent, critical, and skeptical, and those who were ignorant, illogical, and naïve.⁵⁸ By no means was everyone superstitious and easily persuaded about extraordinary events like Jesus' resurrection. When the women reported Jesus' resurrection to the disciples—whom Jesus had notified in advance of His death and resurrection (Matt. 16: 21)—they considered their testimony **nonsense, and they would not believe them** (Lk. 24: 11). Likewise, Thomas would not believe in His resurrection until he had visual, tactile proof. Do these people strike you as gullible fools?

²⁴ But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "**Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side,**

⁵⁸ Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 223.

I will not believe."²⁶ After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace *be* with you."²⁷ Then He said to Thomas, "**Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side**; and do not be unbelieving, but believing."²⁸ Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." (Jn. 20:24-29 NASB)

Jesus graciously responds to Thomas' skepticism by presenting, not one, but three different types of empirical evidence. First, He appears out of nowhere. John makes a point of saying, **the doors having been shut**. That is, Jesus did not come through the door but simply appeared. Second, Jesus proves that He knew about Thomas' skepticism without having been part of the original conversation eight days earlier. Third, He knew about the precise proofs that Thomas required: **the imprint of the nails** in His hands and the hole in Jesus' side where the spear had pierced His body. There is no record of Jesus having spoken with the other disciples again in the **eight days** between v. 25 and 26; thus, Jesus again proves that He is God and also that He is the crucified Jesus risen from the dead.

For the last 2,000 years plus, believers have not had the benefit of such empirical proofs as Thomas and the other 10 original apostles had; nor have they seen and spoken with the risen Lord as Paul did on the road to Damascus. Yet we may believe the written testimonies of eyewitness accounts in the Bible and be **blessed** for believing what these witnesses have said (Jn. 20: 29).

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;³¹ **but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ**, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (Jn. 20:30-31 NASB)

Implicit in John's remark is that the witnesses' accounts of Jesus' miracles and His resurrection recorded in the Bible are reliable and trustworthy. They cannot be casually dismissed as superstitious nonsense published by overzealous followers of the Jesus cult. Moreover, they are **written** for the express purpose of eliciting faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. There were no video recordings of His miracles, but the followers of Jesus were not inclined to believe any crazy story they heard in the marketplace, as Peter says,

For we did not follow **cleverly devised tales** when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. (2 Pet. 1:16 NASB)

2. Jesus acts and speaks in fulfillment of OT Scripture.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus was aware that He was fulfilling the prophecies of the OT, and He did so in obedience to the Scriptures. Note the following verses.⁵⁹

¹³and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. ¹⁴ *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: (Matthew 4:13-14 NASB)

⁵⁹ Cited by John Frame in *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 118, hereafter DWG

When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill.¹⁷ *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: "HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES." (Matthew 8:16-17 NASB)

But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, *as to* how they might destroy Him.¹⁵ But Jesus, aware of *this*, withdrew from there. Many followed Him, and He healed them all,¹⁶ and warned them not to tell who He was.¹⁷ *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:¹⁸ "BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN; MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL is WELL-PLEASED; I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM, AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES.¹⁹ "HE WILL NOT QUARREL, NOR CRY OUT; NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS.²⁰ "A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF, AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT, UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY.²¹ "AND IN HIS NAME THE GENTILES WILL HOPE." (Matthew 12:14-21 NASB)

All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable.³⁵ *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES; I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD." (Matthew 13:34-35 NASB)

Even in His dying moments on the cross, Jesus was conscious of fulfilling scripture. Notice the OT parallels.

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" (Matthew 27:46 NASB)

For the choir director; upon Aijeleth Hashshahar. A Psalm of David. My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning. (Psalm 22:1 NASB)

And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last. (Luke 23:46 NASB)

Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have ransomed me, O LORD, God of truth. (Psalm 31:5 NASB)

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, "I am thirsty." (John 19:28 NASB)

My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws; And You lay me in the dust of death. (Psalm 22:15 NASB)

After His resurrection, Jesus met two of his disciples (not two of the original twelve) on the road to Emmaus. They were disturbed by the fact that a great prophet in Israel who was "mighty in deed and word" had been crucified. They had hoped that he was the one "who was going to redeem Israel." To relieve these disciples of their disappointment and confusion, He took them to the OT Scriptures.

And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures (Lk. 24: 13-27 NASB).

A careful examination of the whole passage in Luke will reveal that Christ considered the OT a reliable witness to Himself and His sacrificial atonement. It was, therefore, a trustworthy historical record and a reliable prediction of future events.

3. Jesus regarded the OT as a guide to moral behavior.

And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?"¹⁷ And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is *only* One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."¹⁸ Then he said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS; (Matthew 19:16-18 NASB)

As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"¹⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.¹⁹ "You know the commandments, 'DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, Do not defraud, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'" (Mark 10:17-19 NASB)

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"³⁷ And He said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.'³⁸ "This is the great and foremost commandment.³⁹ "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'⁴⁰ "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:36-40 NASB)

In the Sermon on the Mount, far from contradicting the OT, He corrected the misunderstandings of the Law and further elaborated on the proper spiritual interpretations of the Law.

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY';²⁸ but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28 NASB)

"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER ' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'²² "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell. (Matt. 5:21-22 NASB)

The entire Sermon on the Mount is presented as Jesus' confirmation of the Mosaic Law from which no man could remove even one letter or stroke.

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.¹⁸ "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.¹⁹ "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-19 NASB)

Moreover, Jesus accuses the Jews for their failure to accept the authority of Moses' writings more than 1,000 years after they were written.⁶⁰

"Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope.⁴⁶ "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me.⁴⁷ **"But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"** (John 5:45-47 NASB)

When face to face with Satan himself in the temptation experience in the wilderness, Jesus continually appealed to the OT as the authority for obedience to God. Jesus came not to do His own will, but the will of the Father Who sent Him (Jn.6:38) which included adherence to all the will of the Father written in the Law and the Prophets.

And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."⁴ But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" (Matthew 4:3-4 NASB)

Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory;⁹ and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me."¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" (Matthew 4:8-10 NASB)

After His resurrection, Jesus did not cease appealing to the OT as foundational to everything He had accomplished in His sacrificial death. What He did was the fulfillment of what the Law and the Prophets had already predicted would happen.

And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in **all that the prophets have spoken!**²⁶ "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?"²⁷ **Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets,** He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. (Luke 24:25-27 NASB)

Two of the most important phrases Jesus uses throughout His ministry when appealing to the authority of scripture are: **"Have you not read..."** (Matt 19:4; 21:16; Lk.6:3) and **"it is written"** (Matt 11:10; 21:13; 26:24, 31; Mk 9:12, 13; 11:17). Such phrases are applied to many parts of scripture including history, law, psalms and prophecies. For Jesus, the appeal to the OT was the end of any argument.

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat.² But when the Pharisees saw *this*, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath."³ But He said to them, **"Have you not read** what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions,⁴ how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?⁵ **"Or have you not read in the Law,** that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?⁶ **"But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here.⁷ **"But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,' you****

⁶⁰ Frame, *DWG*, pp. 119-120

would not have condemned the innocent.⁸ "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:1-8 NASB)

And He answered and said, "**Have you not read**, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female (Matthew 19: 4 NASB)

...and said to Him, "Do You hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; **have you never read**, Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babes Thou hast prepared praise for Thyself ?" (Matthew 21: 16 NASB)

"But regarding the resurrection of the dead, **have you not read** that which was spoken to you by God, saying, (Matthew 22: 31 NASB)

"**Have you not even read** this Scripture: The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone; (Mark 12: 10 NASB)

"But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, **have you not read** in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? (Mark 12: 26 NASB)

But He answered and said, "**It is written**, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" (Matthew 4:4 NASB)

And He said to them, "**It is written**, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN." (Matthew 21:13 NASB)

"**It is written** in the prophets, 'AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. (John 6:45 NASB)

Jesus' whole life and ministry "was determined beforehand by Scripture"⁶¹ (To the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, he clearly stated this foreordination.

And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!
²⁶ "**Was it not necessary** for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:25-26 NASB)

4. Jesus argues with His opponents on the basis of single texts in the OT.

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question:⁴² "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" They said to Him, "*The son* of David."⁴³ He said to them, "**Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,'** saying,⁴⁴ 'THE LORD [*Kurios*] SAID TO **MY LORD** [*Kurios*], 'SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET' ""? ⁴⁵ "**If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?"** (Matt. 22:41-45 NASB)

⁶¹ Frame, p. 452

A Psalm of David. The LORD [*Yahweh*] says to my Lord [*Adonay*]: "Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet." (Ps. 110:1 NASB)

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David uses two words, *Yahweh* and *Adonay*, to distinguish the two persons of the godhead, the Father and the Son, while Matthew, under the same inspiration, uses the same word, *Kurios* to show the identity of essence or being between Christ and Yahweh. In this narrative, Christ was not denying that He was a human descendant of David but that He was much more than a human descendant. He was also the Lord God. For our purpose here, we see Christ quoting two words: **Lord**, and then **my Lord** to identify Himself as David's **Lord** while also being *the Son of David*.

In Jn. 8, Jesus cites Deut. 19: 15 to prove that His testimony concerning Himself is given in conjunction with the Father's testimony and is therefore in compliance with the demands of the Law of Moses.

So the Pharisees said to Him, "You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true." (Jn. 8: 13)

"Even in your law it has been written that the testimony of two men is true.¹⁸ **I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me.**" (Jn. 8:17-18 NASB)

"A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed. (Deut. 19:15 NASB)

C. What Jesus Said about His Own Teaching

Did Jesus put the same confidence in His own teaching as he did the OT Scriptures? A brief look at the following passages will help us to answer this question. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ fulfilled the prophecy of Moses in Dt. 18: 18-19.⁶²

'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put **My words** in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.¹⁹ It shall come about that whoever will not listen to **My words** which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him. (Deuteronomy 18:18-19 NASB)

Compare this passage to Jesus' closing comments at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, paying attention especially to the repetition of **words**.

"Therefore everyone who hears these **words of Mine** and **acts on them**, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.²⁵ "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.²⁶ "Everyone who hears these **words of Mine** and **does not act on them**, will be like a foolish man who

⁶² For more discussion of the role of Christ as the new lawgiver, see McNeill, "The Doctrine of Man". In that text, I have relied heavily upon Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*.

built his house on the sand.²⁷ "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall." (Matthew 7:24-27 NASB)

The events leading up to the Sermon emphasize the similarities of between Moses the lawgiver of Israel and Jesus as the greater Moses. Like Moses, Jesus ascends a mountain, sits down—as if in Moses' seat of judgment—and delivers the law to God's people, consisting of blessings (Matt. 5: 2-12) and curses (Matt. 7: 19-27).

When Jesus saw the crowds, **He went up on the mountain**; and after He **sat down**, His disciples came to Him. (Matt. 5:1 NASB)

Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples,² saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees **have seated themselves in the chair of Moses**; (Matt. 23:1-2 NASB)

Therefore, Jesus was fully self-conscious of the fact that He was the greater antitype of the prophet Moses (the type) whose authority was unquestionable. Those who would not listen to the **words** of Christ would come to ruin, but those who listened to Him and acted on His words would be secure. Listening to His words must be followed by obedience to them; listening to them and not acting upon them was the same as despising His words. Lip service would not do (Isa. 29: 13).

A casual reading of the sermon in Matthew 5—7 will disclose the numerous times Jesus introduces His law with a profound air of authority unmatched by the scribes and Pharisees of His day. Moreover, He equates the ethical authority of His words with the ethical authority of the Mosaic Law, even suggesting that His words further explain and clarify the words of Moses: "**You have heard that it was said...but I say to you...**" One must not only hear **these words** but must practice them to avoid the ruin of the coming destruction. Also notice the allusion to Noah's flood in the text above. As the contemporaries of Noah ignored God's prophetic word through Noah and did not **act** upon them, **the floods came** and overwhelmed them.

So it will be when Christ returns in glory to judge the world. The **house** being built on the **rock**—also an allusion (subtle reference) to the **rock** in the wilderness (cf. Ex. 17: 6; 1 Cor. 10: 4)—is a metaphor (figure of speech) for one's **life**. One must build his life on the rock of Christ, more specifically, the **rock** or foundation of His **words**, the Scriptures. Otherwise, he will face certain destruction when the "floods" of the final judgment come.

At the conclusion of the sermon, the depth and authority of His words were recognized by the whole multitude. **These words** in Matt. 7: 28 could be an allusion to Deut. 18: 18, **I will put my words in His mouth**.

When Jesus had finished **these words**, the crowds were amazed at His teaching;²⁹ for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as their scribes. (Matthew 7:28-29 NASB)

Jesus was confident that He could predict future events (Lk. 21: 10-33; Matt. 24), and we may safely assume that He applied this same confidence to everything else He said. This is clearly the implication of the "**I say [to] unto you**" passages.

When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "**Truly, truly, I say to you**, that one of you will betray Me." (John 13:21 NASB)

And Jesus said to him, "**Truly I say to you**, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times." (Mark 14:30 NASB)

"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER ' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' ²² **But I say to you** that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell. (Matthew 5:21-22 NASB)

Before His departure into heaven, Jesus also promised that the Holy Spirit would come and bring to remembrance everything He had taught them, further evidence that Christ considered His teaching to be the foundation stone of the church.

"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 that I said to you.**" (John 14:26 NASB)

D. The Apostles' Use of the OT Scriptures

According to Roger Nicole, there are 295 quotations of the OT by NT writers, occupying some 352 NT verses. One verse in 22.5 in the NT is an OT quotation, and there are many more citations of it where the OT is mentioned but not directly quoted.

It can therefore be asserted, without exaggeration, that more than 10 per cent of the New Testament text is made up of citations or direct allusions to the Old Testament.⁶³

Paul cites the OT 93 times, twenty-three of which occur in Romans 9, 10, and 11 to give some explanation and clarification of the puzzling question of why the Jews did not recognize and accept their Messiah.⁶⁴

1. Introductory formulas

Several introductory formulas are used by the NT writers to help us understand their view of the OT. One of the most common is the expression, **it is written**. Whenever Scripture is speaking, God is speaking. When we examine Rom. 9:13, 15, 17, we find out that there is an interchange between **it is written**, **He says** and **Scripture says** when it is clear from the passages cited that God is the author in all three citations.

Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."¹⁴ What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!¹⁵ **For He says to Moses**, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM

⁶³ Roger Nicole, "New Testament Use of the Old", pp. 137-138, *Revelation and the Bible*, Carl F. H. Henry, ed.

⁶⁴ Edwin A. Blum, "The Apostles' View of Scripture", p. 41, *Inerrancy*, Geisler, ed. I owe much of the material in this section to Blum.

I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."¹⁶ So then it *does* not *depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.¹⁷ **For the Scripture says to Pharaoh**, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH." (Rom. 9:13-17 NASB)

We see that no distinction is made by the writers between God and Scripture. Paul says,

⁸**The Scripture**, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, **preached** the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU." (Gal. 3:8 NASB)

¹ Now **the LORD said** to Abram.... And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." (Gen. 12:1a, 3 NASB)

However, **the Scripture**—the OT canon—did not exist at that time and could not have spoken these words to Abraham. Paul is equating what **Scripture** says with what **the Lord** says, since Scripture, in Paul's thinking, is the very word of God. Other texts:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.¹⁷ For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; **as it is written**, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." (Romans 1:16-17 NASB)

What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?⁴ May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar, **as it is written**, "THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED." (Romans 3:3-4 NASB)

...so that, just as **it is written**, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD." (1 Corinthians 1:31 NASB)

For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for **it is written**, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM." (Galatians 3:10 NASB)

In other passages, the NT writers attribute to God what others say. Examples of such references are the following:

Therefore, **just as the Holy Spirit says**, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,⁸ DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, (Hebrews 3:7-8 NASB)

For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you would hear His voice,⁸ Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness, (Psalm 95:7-8 NASB)

The author of Hebrews attributes the saying to the **Holy Spirit** when it is actually written by the Psalmist. Acts 4: 25 attributes the words of David in Psalm 2 to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

And when they heard *this*, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM,²⁵ **who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS? (Acts 4:24-25 NASB)**

Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples devising a vain thing? (Psalm 2:1 NASB)

Hebrews 1:6-8 is a reference to Ps. 97:7, Ps. 104:4, and Ps. 45:6, written by psalmists but ascribed to God. We find in the NT "habitual identification...of the text of Scripture with the utterances of God."⁶⁵

And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, "AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM."⁷ And of the angels **He says**, "WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS, AND HIS MINISTERS A FLAME OF FIRE."⁸ But of the Son *He says*, "YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM. (Heb. 1:6-8 NASB)

Let all those be ashamed who serve graven images, Who boast themselves of idols; Worship Him, all you gods. (Ps. 97:7 NASB)

He makes the winds His messengers, Flaming fire His ministers. (Ps. 104:4 NASB)

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom. (Ps. 45:6 NASB)

2. Arguments based on single words or phrases

We have seen how Jesus uses two words from the OT to confound the Pharisees, **my Lord**. Often the NT writers base their arguments concerning a theological dispute or a moral teaching upon a single phrase or even a single word from the OT scriptures. In Romans 4, Paul uses a single sentence from Genesis to prove that Abraham was saved by believing and not by working. Consequently, all Christians are saved in the same way, by faith in the promises of God and not by personal works of righteousness.

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.³ For what does the Scripture say? "**ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.**"⁴ Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.⁵ But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, (Rom. 4:2-5 NASB)

And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."⁶ **Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.** (Gen. 15:5-6 NASB)

⁶⁵ B.B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 300

Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "**FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.**"¹⁰ How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; (Rom. 4:9-10 NASB)

Now not for his sake only was it written **that it was credited to him,**²⁴ but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, (Rom. 4:23-24 NASB)

In Romans 9, Paul cites three texts, Ps. 18: 49, Deut. 32: 43, and Ps. 117: 1 to prove God's eternal purpose of sending Christ to save not only Jews but also Gentiles.

For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises *given* to the fathers,⁹ **and for the Gentiles** to glorify God for His mercy; **as it is written,** "THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME."¹⁰ Again he says, "REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE."¹¹ And again, "PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM."¹² Again Isaiah says, "THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE." (Rom. 15:8-12 NASB)

Paul cites Gen. 2: 24 to convince the Corinthians that every time they had sex with prostitutes—an amazing statement addressed to professing Christians, of all people—they were joining the body of Christ with a prostitute.

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? **Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?** May it never be!¹⁶ Or do you not know that **the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her?** For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH." (1 Cor. 6:15-16 NASB)

By citing one verse from Deuteronomy, Paul proves that Christ became a curse on behalf of all believers.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written, "**CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE**"— (Gal. 3:13 NASB)

"If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree,²³ his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (**for he who is hanged is accursed of God**), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance. (Deut. 21:22-23 NASB)

The author of Hebrews cites Ps. 22, a messianic psalm predicting the sufferings of Christ, to assure believers that even as Christ, the God-man, was perfected through suffering, they also are perfected through suffering and therefore are identified as Christ's **brethren**.

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.¹¹ For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them

brethren,¹² saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO **MY BRETHREN**, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE." (Heb. 2:10-12 NASB)

I will tell of Your name to **my brethren**; In the midst of the assembly I will praise You. (Ps. 22:22 NASB)

Other examples include Heb. 3:13-15 and 4:7, citing Ps. 95: 7-8. The last citation in Galatians is especially worth noting because Paul sees the significance in the use of a singular rather than a plural noun, **seed** rather than **seeds**.

Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his **seed**. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your **seed**," that is, Christ.¹⁷ What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.¹⁸ For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise. (Gal. 3:16-18 NASB)

The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your **descendants** I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him. (Gen. 12:7 NASB)

And Jehovah appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy **seed** will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto Jehovah, who appeared unto him. (Gen. 12:7 ASV)

And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy **seed** will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him. (Gen. 12:7 KJV)

I have included quotations from the ASV and the KJV along with the NASB which I believe should not have translated the word *zera* (**seed**) in the plural (**descendants**), thus rendering Paul's argument confusing. The word for **seed** (or **offspring**, NIV, ESV) is singular, as is the Greek word, *sperma* in the Greek translation of the OT.

Paul bases his whole argument on this one word.⁶⁶ If the comprehensive inheritance of salvation is based on the law or faith, then there are two kinds of seed and not just one: the Jews earn salvation through works and Christians receive salvation by grace alone. (So take your pick about how you wish to be saved, works or grace.) But this is not the gospel. In other words, Paul was willing to base a very crucial argument with foundational implications for our salvation on one single word in the OT scriptures, thus demonstrating his confidence and reverence for every word of the OT. Going back to our former discussion, Paul's knowledge that the original autographs were no longer available did not diminish his confidence in the OT copies.

3. Confidence in the practical usefulness of Scripture

It is clear that the NT writers were certain that the OT scriptures had current and practical relevance to the pressing concerns and ethical behavior of their day.

⁶⁶ Blum, p. 50

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4 NASB)

²⁰yet, with respect to the promise of God, he [*Abraham*] did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, ²¹and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. ²²Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. ²³**Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, ²⁴but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,** (Romans 4:20-24 NASB)

For it is written in the Law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? ¹⁰**Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written**, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher *to thresh* in hope of sharing *the crops*. (1 Corinthians 9:9-10 NASB)

Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the *food* of the temple, *and* those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? ¹⁴**So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living (*ζαο*) from the gospel.** (1 Cor. 9:13-14 NASB)

What does muzzling oxen and priests eating their share of OT sacrifices have to do with providing pastors a livable wage? Everything, because God is still concerned for the **living** (*ζαο*) of those who faithfully (cf. 2 Tim. 2: 2) preach His gospel. Failure to provide for them is robbing God (Mal. 3: 8, which is also in the OT.) Paul uses OT case laws and contextualizes them for the first century church. We should follow his example for the 21st century church without going too far by attempting to resurrect the OT theocracy—an administration which has already served its purpose.

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath *of God*, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. ²⁰"BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:19-21 NASB)

The capitalized words in the NASB indicate OT quotations. Paul is quoting from Deut. 32: 35 and Prov. 25: 21-22. Throughout the NT epistles, we have apostolic examples of ethical principles drawn from the OT—not the original autographs, but copies of the OT which they believed to be accurate and trustworthy.

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea.... Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. ⁶**Now these things happened as examples for us**, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. ⁷Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." (1 Corinthians 10:1, 5-7 NASB)

A well-known text illustrating the enduring relevance of the OT scriptures for our edification is 2 Tim. 3:14-17, which is especially significant since Paul wrote this at the end of his life shortly before his martyrdom. It was one of the last things he said to Timothy, his child in the faith.

¹⁴You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, ¹⁵and that from childhood you have known the **sacred writings** which

are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.¹⁶ **All Scripture is inspired by God 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. (2 Timothy 3:14-17 NASB)

From childhood Timothy had known the **sacred writings** which were able to give him **wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus**. The OT scriptures, therefore, have sufficient information to lead one to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The reason for this is given in vv. 16 and 17. **All Scripture is inspired by God....** The phrase **inspired by God** is one word in the Greek, *theopneustos* or **God-breathed**. It could also be argued that Paul includes **the things you have learned** as being part of Scripture, for he qualifies these things by saying, **knowing from whom you have learned them**. (See below.)

The emphasis in this passage is upon the divine quality of the word delivered. Its source is none other than God Himself even as the source of life in the first man Adam is described as the breath of life. God **breathed into his nostrils the breath of life**. For this reason, **all**, not some, scripture is **profitable for teaching** and everything else that affects the life of an individual Christian and the corporate life of the church. I will include here some of my previous notes on 2 Tim. 3.

In **v. 15** Paul takes Timothy beyond his own tutelage (instruction) all the way back to his early childhood instruction, even from his infancy (*brephos*; cf. Lk. 2: 12). His grandmother Lois and mother Eunice had been OT believers who had faithfully taught Timothy the **“sacred writings”**, the OT scriptures. These OT scriptures were sufficient apart from the NT scriptures (which had not been available to Timothy) to lead someone to a knowledge of salvation in Christ. The Bible is a book about God’s plan of redemption in Christ Jesus, and we should expect to see types and pictures of Christ throughout the OT, pictures which prompted a man like Simeon to declare of the Christ child, “Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation” (Lk. 2: 29-30). On all his missionary journeys, it was Paul’s habit to visit the synagogues and reason with the Jews from the OT scriptures proving that Jesus was the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah (Acts 17: 2-3; Apollos did the same; 18: 28). By taking Timothy back to his infancy and the OT traditions of his mother and grandmother, Paul was demonstrating the **timelessness** of the gospel tradition reaching back as far as the promise made to Adam and Abraham (Gen. 3: 15; 15: 6). This was no new teaching, here today, but refuted as false tomorrow. Timothy could trust it not only on the basis of Paul’s character but **on the basis of its consistency with the OT**.

This equation of the reliability of the commodity and character of those who convey it was a standard way of measuring a truth claim in Paul’s culture; and it is the steady historical dimensions of the gospel (demonstrated by the reliability of the people mentioned) that Paul draws on here. To veer [depart from a path] from what had been passed on by trustworthy predecessors, without some good reason, was the exception and not the rule. Novelty had little intrinsic value and was regarded with suspicion (Towner, p. 581; words in brackets mine).

Hendriksen distinguishes the terms **“all scripture”** and **“sacred writings”** as two separate things. The **“sacred writings”** were the OT scriptures, but **“all scripture”** included any other writings since the close of the OT canon receiving the stamp of the Holy Spirit’s authenticity (p. 300). There is evidence in 1 Tim. 5: 18 that some of the gospel accounts had been circulated and received by the church as authoritative. (Note the quotation of Lk. 10: 7 which is placed alongside a quotation from

Deut. 25: 4 and treated as scripture; Hendriksen, p. 301; see also Lk. 1: 4 in which Luke claims to give an exact account of the life of Christ). It is also true that by the time 2 *Timothy* was written, Paul had already documented the authority of his own writings (1 Thes. 2: 13; 2 Thes. 3: 14; Gal. 1: 8-9; 1 Cor. 14: 37). Peter also recognized the authority of Paul's writings (2 Pet. 3: 15-16), and does not hesitate to claim authority for his own writing on the basis of personal eyewitness accounts of the majesty of Christ (2 Pet. 1: 16). Although the canon of the NT was not **officially** completed until the Council of Hippo in 393 AD, the body of Christ, manifested in thousands of local churches, had progressively recognized the authority of those writings which later became known as the NT. As Paul wrote 2 *Timothy*, the scriptures were "growing".

Towner takes a different approach (see pp. 585-590 for complete discussion, a brief summary of which is given below). First of all, *pasa graphē* can be translated "every scripture" in which case Paul could be saying that **every text** of the OT scripture is inspired by God, leaving none unaccounted for. (Thus, the ASV rendering, "Every scripture inspired of God" is an ambiguous translation leaving open the possibility that **some** scriptures are **not** inspired.) The plural form of *graphē* ordinarily refers to the whole collected canon of the OT scriptures (Matt. 26: 54, 56; Lk. 24: 45), but the singular form in **3: 16** is not used this way or even to refer to a book of the OT, but to specific texts. In Gal. 3: 8 Paul uses the singular (**Scripture**) to refer to the specific text of Gen. 12: 3; and while his use of the singular form in Gal. 3: 22 may be interpreted more broadly as the whole OT, it could just as easily be a reference to a specific text quoted in Gal. 3: 10-13 and 16, particularly v. 10. Furthermore, Paul has already cited specific texts in earlier chapters (2: 19; 3: 8-9), and the immediate context of "sacred writings" would seem to dictate the meaning in **v. 16**. Timothy had grown up with the sacred writings, the OT, and Paul wishes to emphasize that **every single text** of these writings was profitable for him. The primary point Paul is making in the passage is that every text of Scripture is **useful or profitable simply because of its source**. It is "God-breathed" (*theopneustos*) and, therefore, useful.

...this statement of the divine authority of every text of Scripture is really preliminary to the **main topic of the verse**, which comes in the second predicate adjective ["useful"]. Inspiration is, in a sense, a platform in the argument about Scripture's "usefulness," so that from the first adjective ["inspired by God"] flows the second. **But it is the thought of Scripture's "usefulness" or function that Paul develops** (Towner, p. 590; words in brackets mine).

Frame argues further that *theopneustos* implies more than divine origin, but also that Scripture is "God's speech" and may be considered identical with God.

Everything, after all, has a divine origin and is in some sense God's creation. What Paul says here [in 2 Tim. 3 D.M.] is that the Scripture is breathed out, not created. What can that mean? Well, to breathe out words is simply to *speak* them. Paul is saying that the OT words are the *speech* of God, his personal utterances. Speech is not the same thing as creation. In chapters 7, 8, and 11, I argued that the word is God, that it is divine, and that it is therefore precisely *not* a created thing. That is true of the living Word, Jesus Christ, and it is true of all divine utterances. The written Word is, of course, expressed on a created medium, whether stone tablets, papyrus, paper, or digital media. But the Word that is written on these media is divine. It is the personal word of God himself. So "breathed out by God" means "spoken by God."⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Frame, *DWG*, p. 125, emphasis his.

God’s “eternal inter-Trinitarian speaking” [e.g. “Let us make man in our image”, D.M.], Frame argues, is a “necessary divine attribute” of God without which He would cease to be God. His sovereignty over all creation, His omniscience, justice, and many other attributes are also “necessary” or *essential* to His being. Take any of them away and God ceases to be God.⁶⁸ As John says that **God is love** (1 Jn. 4: 8), we may say that “God’s word is God himself”.⁶⁹ This does not mean that we may limit God to His communicated word in Scripture, for God was God before the communicated word. Likewise, we may not say that the sum-total of God is love, for God is also wrath, truth, etc. Nevertheless, there is an identity in Scripture between God and the Word of God. John makes this clear in his gospel when he says, **and the Word was God** (Jn. 1:1). A fallible human’s word is not necessarily identical to himself, for he often makes statements that are based upon incomplete knowledge, or he lies. But God never lies and is never mistaken about anything He says. His communication of himself, mankind, and the world is infallible; therefore, His word is identical with Himself.

Second Peter 1:16-21 is also very instructive in that it mentions the medium by which God breathed the Scriptures.

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.¹⁷ For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"—¹⁸ and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.¹⁹ So we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.²⁰ But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one’s own interpretation,²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:16-21 NASB)

Peter is referring to their personal witness of Jesus’ transfiguration recorded in Matthew 17: 1-8 and elsewhere in the Synoptics. Peter could claim dogmatically that the disciples’ testimony of the power of Christ was not based upon **tales** or “myths”. They saw Him transfigured before their very eyes and heard God’s voice from heaven. One interpretation of v. 19 is that the **prophetic word** is made **more sure** because of the disciples’ eyewitness account which gives credibility to the written word.

This interpretation is possible, and the NASB translation, **So we have the prophetic word made more sure** lends itself to this interpretation. The Greek text literally says, “And we have more sure, the word of prophecy”—suggesting the idea that the prophetic word written in the OT is even **more sure** than the eyewitness accounts.⁷⁰ Jesus Himself lends support to this interpretation when in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Abraham says to the rich man, **“If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, [i.e. the prophetic word] they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead”** (Luke 16:31 NASB).

⁶⁸ This is a serious argument against “Open Theism” which teaches that God is not “all-knowing” and that our actions can actually change the future apart from God’s sovereign, controlling will. See my critique of open theism in my “Christian Worldview” course taught at Belhaven University.

⁶⁹ Frame, *DWG*, p. 49.

⁷⁰ Frame, *DWG*, p. 126; so also B.B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 135

Commenting on 2 Timothy 3: 15-17 and 2 Peter 1: 19-21, Frame remarks,

Indeed, they are the capstone of a theme that pervades the entire Scripture, that God rules his people by a written document. That theme begins with the stone tablets written by the finger of Yahweh on Mount Sinai in Exodus....

What these two passages tell us is that there will come a time in which no one can personally recall the living voice of a prophet or apostle, and that in that time especially we should turn to the written Word. We are now living in that time. It is not a time to turn back to autonomous thinking. It is a time to read in Scripture God's personal words to us.⁷¹

The Holy Spirit is at work mediating the words of God to men so that they are not merely the words of men but the words of God written by men and inspired by the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, the words for **spirit** and **breath** in the Greek and Hebrew are the same words, *ruach* in the Hebrew and *pneuma* in the Greek. The Spirit of God ensures that the words of Scripture are the very breath of God.

4. Summary of the apostolic perspective of the Old Testament

In his *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, B. B. Warfield states very clearly the essence of “The Real Problem of Inspiration”.⁷² The claim made by liberal theologians when this book was first published (1948), was that “the doctrine of verbal inspiration is based on a few isolated statements of Scripture to the neglect, if not to the outrage, of its phenomena...” To the contrary, Warfield claims that “The doctrine of verbal inspiration is based on the broad foundation of the carefully ascertained *doctrine* of the Scripture writers on the subject. It is the product of Biblical Theology.” Continuing, he says,

It is based wholly upon an exegetical fact. It is based on the exegetical fact that our Lord and His apostles held this doctrine of Scripture, and everywhere deal with the Scriptures of the Old Testament in accordance with it, as the very Word of God, even in their narrative parts.⁷³

In other words, the doctrine of verbal inspiration is based upon the teaching of the Bible itself—the teaching of the inspired writers who themselves recognized the authority of the Old Testament—and, we shall see, their own writings later on. Moreover, if the doctrine of plenary inspiration is abandoned, we have much more to lose than merely an authoritative Bible. We have the whole of Christian theology developed throughout the history of the Christian church.

If criticism has made such discoveries as to necessitate the abandonment of the doctrine of plenary inspiration, it is not enough to say that we are compelled to abandon only a “particular theory of inspiration,” though that is true enough. We must go on to say that that “particular theory of inspiration” is the theory of the apostles and of the Lord, and that in abandoning *it* we are abandoning *them* as our doctrinal teachers and guides, as our “exegetes,” in the deep and rich sense of that word.... This real issue is to be kept clearly before us, and faced courageously. Nothing is gained by closing our eyes to the seriousness of the problem which we are confronting. Stated plainly it is just

⁷¹ Frame, *DWG*, pp. 127-128

⁷² Warfield, Chapter 4

⁷³ Warfield, p. 179

this: Are the New Testament writers trustworthy guides in doctrine? Or are we at liberty to reject their authority, and frame contrary doctrines for ourselves? If the latter pathway be taken, certainly the doctrine of plenary [complete and absolute, D.M.] inspiration is not the only doctrine that is “destroyed,” and the labor of revising our creeds may as well be saved and the shorter process adopted of simply throwing them away. No wonder we are told that the same advance in knowledge which requires a changed view of the Bible necessitates also a whole new theology. If the New Testament writers are not trustworthy as teachers of doctrine and we have to go elsewhere for the source and norm of truth as to God and duty and immortality, it will not be strange if a very different system of doctrine from that delivered by the Scriptures and docilely [easily and irresistibly, D.M.] received from them by the Church results.⁷⁴

E. How the Apostles Viewed Their Own Writings

What did the apostles think about their own writings?⁷⁵ It is one thing to say they thought the writings of the OT were the word of God and were authoritative, but quite another to say that they thought their own words were the very word of God. When we examine the NT, it becomes clear that the apostles considered their authority as coming from God.

Paul calls himself an apostle, a herald, a witness, and an ambassador (Rom. 1:1, 5; Gal. 1:8, 9; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1Tim. 2:7). The letters he wrote were to be read in the public assemblies of the churches and obeyed. This public reading was the time-honored practice of the synagogues in which the OT scriptures had been read for years. Paul makes it clear that what he says was not in words of human wisdom but they were words taught by the Holy Spirit. He also praises the Thessalonians that when they received his word, they received it as **the word of God**.

When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter *that is coming* from Laodicea. (Colossians 4:16 NASB)

If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and **do not associate with him**, so that he will be put to shame. (2 Thessalonians 3:14 NASB)

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,¹³ which things we also speak, **not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit**, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*. (1 Corinthians 2:12-13 NASB)

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, **you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God**, which also performs its work in you who believe. (1 Thess. 2:13 NASB)

There has been some misunderstanding of what Paul says to the Corinthians as if he was making a distinction between the authority of his teaching and the authority of Christ’s teaching.

⁷⁴ Warfield, pp. 180-181, italic emphasis his, underlined emphasis mine

⁷⁵ Blum, *Inerrancy*, Geisler, ed., pp. 51-53

But to the rest **I say, not the Lord**, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. (1 Corinthians 7:12 NASB)

Here, he is not disclaiming inspiration or authority for what he says; but rather he is making a distinction between what the Lord Jesus said about divorce during His earthly ministry and what Paul is now telling the Corinthians in a completely new situation they were facing. Jesus had addressed the issue of divorce between two covenant members, not divorce between a believer and an unbeliever.⁷⁶ It should not be overlooked that in that same chapter he orders his instructions to be followed in all the churches (v. 17). Later in the letter Paul identifies his instructions with the command of the Lord (1 Cor. 14: 37).

Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. **And so I direct in all the churches.** (1 Corinthians 7:17 NASB)

If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, **let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment.** (1 Corinthians 14:37 NASB)

If Paul was only offering friendly advice in 1 Cor. 7: 12, he could be accused of inconsistency for claiming the Lord's authority later in the letter. It is clear from Paul's own testimony that he was fully aware that his teaching and writing were invested with the authority of Christ (2 Cor. 10: 8; 2 Thess. 2: 15; 3: 6-14).

So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the **traditions** which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by **letter from us.** (2 Thessalonians 2:15 NASB)

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and **not according to the tradition which you received from us.** (2 Thessalonians 3:6 NASB)

The Epistle to the Galatians has long been recognized along with Romans as Paul's definitive statement of the doctrine of justification by faith apart from the works of the law. However, the first order of business in the first two chapters is Paul's defense of his own apostleship, without which the rest of the letter would have had little influence upon the Galatians. In those two chapters, Paul maintains that he received the gospel directly from Christ, independently of the apostles in Jerusalem. Convinced that he was endowed with the very words of Christ, he did not even consult with the apostles about his teaching for the first fourteen years after his conversion, and only then because he was concerned about rumors that he and the other apostles were preaching a different gospel.⁷⁷

In the introduction, he warned the Galatians not to listen to anyone who preached a different message from the one he had already given them. This would include any apostle, including Paul himself, or even an angel from heaven. Thus, Paul invested the message he had received from Christ with an authority above the angels in heaven.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ For an extensive discussion on divorce, see my notes on "Anthropology", and Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*.

⁷⁷ Donald F. McNeill, "Galatians" (see christcommunitystudycenter.org)

⁷⁸ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, Vol. II, p. 539, John E. Meeter, ed.

⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel **contrary to what we have preached to you**, he is to be accursed! ⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel **contrary to what you received**, he is to be accursed! (Galatians 1:8-9 NASB)

Imagine any evangelical preacher today telling his congregation that if they did not agree with everything he said in his sermons, they would go to hell. No biblical evangelical believes that his words have such authority. But Paul the apostle did.

Likewise, Luke believed that his account of Christ's birth, ministry, death, and resurrection which he records in his gospel were **the exact truth**.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³ it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; ⁴ so that you may know **the exact truth** about the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4 NASB)

Other translations (ESV, KJV, NIV, NKJ) use the word **certainty** rather than **exact truth**. Luke was unambiguously confident that his account was exactly truthful and accurate.

Jesus promised His disciples shortly before the crucifixion that the Holy Spirit would be a reliable **Comforter** who would **“teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you”** (Jn. 14: 26). Jesus was speaking directly to His immediate disciples who would serve as the foundation of the church (Eph. 2: 20); therefore, the promise of remembering what He spoke and being taught **all things** by the Holy Spirit is not a general promise for Christians in all ages. There is no one living today to whom Jesus spoke directly and who needs to be reminded of words he never heard Jesus say. What we have is the apostolic witness (**tradition**) found in the NT Scriptures. Thus, this promise was fulfilled within the first century and the completion of the NT. Acting upon this promise, the disciples went about preaching—and later on, writing—with full confidence in the assistance of the Holy Spirit in every phase of their ministry.

"When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, **He will testify about Me**, (John 15:26 NASB)

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, **He will guide you into all the truth**; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. (John 16:13 NASB)

To reiterate, the promise of infallible guidance is not to all believers, but to the original disciples and those who were chosen as the foundation of the church and authors of the NT.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰ **having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, (Eph. 2:19-20 NASB)

Any building has but one foundation, not two, and especially not a thousand or ten thousand according to the number of self-professed and self-appointed apostles living today. The apostles

and NT prophets (cf. Eph. 3: 4-6) were the foundation of the church with Christ as the cornerstone. However, I am not denying the doctrine of illumination, in which the Spirit enlightens every believer's mind and heart to understand the word of God, including the apostolic tradition. Like the Apostle Paul who became an eyewitness of Christ's glory many years later (Acts 9), the original apostles could not forget what they had seen on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17: 1-8) and throughout Jesus' earthly ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection appearances. They had no need to follow or devise unbelievable stories.

For we did not follow **cleverly devised tales** when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but **we were eyewitnesses of His majesty**. (2 Peter 1:16 NASB)

This privileged revelation inspired their personal sacrifice in death and exile, but it also gave birth to the confidence with which they wrote the NT.⁷⁹

F. How the Apostles Viewed the Writings of Other Apostles

Finally, did the apostles invest the writings of other apostles with the same authority as they did their own? There is strong evidence that they did. Peter compares the letters of the Apostle Paul to the **rest of the Scriptures**. It should be noted from v. 16 that purposeful distortion of Paul's writings was the same as the distortion of the OT and brought the same consequences.

¹⁵and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, ¹⁶as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also **the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction**. (2 Peter 3:15-16 NASB)

As we have previously seen, Paul places the testimony of Luke's account alongside the writings of Moses.⁸⁰

For the Scripture says, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING," and "**The laborer is worthy of his wages**." (1 Timothy 5:18 NASB)

"Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; **for the laborer is worthy of his wages**. Do not keep moving from house to house. (Lk. 10:7 NASB)

"You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing. (Deut. 25:4 NASB)

Paul is quoting Luke as a reliable source for Jesus' teaching. It should also be noted that Jesus did not have to quote the entire OT to prove His confidence in the entire OT, and Paul did not have to quote the entire book of Luke to prove his confidence in Luke's gospel. Quotations from the Scriptures do not work the same way as quotations from common literature. When I quote theologians favorably, no reader should assume that I agree with everything they have written or that they are infallible. However, the internal witness of Scripture is that the word of God in its

⁷⁹ One of the most convincing proofs of the resurrection of Christ is the transformation of these timid and fearful disciples into fearless preachers who literally turned the world upside down (Acts 17: 6).

⁸⁰ John E. Meeter, ed. *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, p. 539

entirety is inspired, known as plenary inspiration. No human being—theologian, archeologist, historian, scientist, et al.—has sufficient authority to decide which portions of the Bible are inspired and which are not. There is no test of Scripture higher and more reliable than Scripture itself. Doubtless, the Muslim religion claims the same reliability for the Qur'an, but there are many reasons this claim can be challenged. Jesus and Paul did not engage in textual criticism, determining the reliability of every individual text; and modern readers should not assume that only the texts they specifically mentioned were considered reliable.

IV. The Authority of the New Testament⁸¹

While we have many scriptures in the NT attesting to (verifying) the authority of the OT, we should not be surprised to find little attestation to the general authority of the NT.⁸² The reason is that the collected NT writings were not compiled into a canon until much later.⁸³ However, there is ample evidence that the NT continues the same function as the OT as the “personal word of God” and that the NT completes the story of God’s redemption began in the OT. The covenant in the OT was a written document, and it is inconceivable that the New Covenant document, the NT, would fail to have “written attestation”.⁸⁴

The Law of Moses was to be regularly read to the OT people, and the kings of Israel were required to have personal copies for their reading.

Then he took the book of the covenant and read *it* in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" (Exodus 24:7 NASB)

Then afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law.³⁵ There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel with the women and the little ones and the strangers who were living among them. (Joshua 8:34-35 NASB)

Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who *could* listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month.³ He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. (Nehemiah 8:2-3 NASB)

"Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests.¹⁹ "It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes,²⁰ that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel. (Deuteronomy 17:18-20 NASB)

⁸¹ The following material relies heavily upon John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pp. 129-132

⁸² In the same way that 1 Tim. 3: 15-17 and 2 Pet. 1: 19-21 attest to the OT.

⁸³ See below for the discussion on the NT canon.

⁸⁴ Frame, *DWG*, p. 129

Considering that the NT scriptures are the NT covenant document, it would be extremely out of the ordinary if they had not been written down and preserved for future generations. As God had spoken to His people through the prophets in a variety of ways, His final revelation to them is through His son (Heb. 1: 1-3). In addition to the verbal communication of Jesus in the gospels, we also have the further explanation and application of His teaching through the NT writers since His words are essential to our salvation and Christian life (Jn. 6: 68).

In 2 Thessalonians 2: 15, Paul identifies the traditions that he and other apostles passed on to the church, “either by our spoken word or by our letter.”

...Jesus appoints the apostles to remember these words (John 14: 26) as well as to receive additional revelation. By their own oral teaching, the apostles could preserve the memory of Jesus’ words for only one or two more generations. A written record would seem to be the only way in which generations of believers after the apostolic period would have access to Jesus’ words. Without a written record of them, and of the apostles’ testimony to them, those words would be lost to us forever. And without those words, we do not have Jesus as our covenant Lord or as our Savior. Without these words, there can be no Christianity, no Christian church. Only a written document can preserve these words as God’s personal words to us.⁸⁵

Much effort has been expended by missionaries in recent years in “orality” training by which African Christian leaders are encouraged to memorize and paraphrase large portions of the Bible—primarily, but not exclusively, narratives—and transfer this methodology to non-literate church members. Certainly, the sheer quantity of memorization and summarization of the Bible required by orality training is valuable to any believer, literate or not. Moreover, before the Gutenberg press became available in 1454 AD, books had to be copied word for word by hand, rendering the Scriptures too expensive for personal ownership until well into the 1500’s after the Reformation. Therefore, the public reading of the Bible was crucial for the average church member to have any knowledge of the Bible.

However, only very poor people have this limitation today, and the church in every culture has the responsibility to make the Bible accessible to every member. Christians with Bibles should be willing to loan them to their reliable friends and relatives—at least those who can be trusted to return them! I have spent my time in Africa encouraging pastors to read the Bible and to learn the skills of interpretation.⁸⁶ Apart from the often-quoted African myth that Africans remember everything they hear, this has not been my experience as a Bible teacher when grading exams. When it comes to the Bible, you (my African brothers and sisters) easily forget just like we do. Moreover, I have often encouraged you to read an English translation of the Bible, thus furthering your command of the English language in which thousands of good Bible commentaries are available, some of them online for free.⁸⁷ (For examples, see thirdmill.org and monergism.com)

⁸⁵ *DWG*, p. 130, emphasis mine.

⁸⁶ See christcommunitystudycenter.org for courses on interpretation.

⁸⁷ This sounds very “colonial” and “imperialistic” these days in the “woke” West. I do not apologize. Not only are the effects of British colonialism—economic, educational, governmental, social—mostly on the beneficial side, it facilitated the introduction of the gospel into sub-Saharan Africa, a decidedly positive good. See also Bruce Gilley, *The Case for Colonialism* and Nigel Biggar, *Colonialism*, for an informative and well-researched politically incorrect view of colonialism.

As we have seen in previous citations from Scripture, the written documents (gospels, letters) are no less authoritative than the verbal teaching of the apostles. Paul required his letters to be read in front of the congregation, even putting the elders in Thessalonica under oath to do so.

When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter *that is coming* from Laodicea. (Col. 4:16 NASB)

I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. (1Thess. 5:27 ESV)

The practice of public reading apostolic letters in the churches corresponds to the public reading of the law in the solemn assemblies by OT priests (see verses quoted above). Not content to have the general truths of his teaching presented second-hand, Paul exhorted the leaders to have them read word for word according to the OT pattern.⁸⁸

Quite to be expected, we have very little reference from the NT authors concerning other NT writings. Jesus and the apostles were continually referring to the OT to prove that Christ was the fulfillment of the OT Scripture and that the OT was still relevant to the ethical practice of believers. However, the NT was a work in progress throughout the first century. (See “Canon of the NT” below.)

V. Other Proofs for the Authority of Scripture

A. The Fulfilled Prophecies of the Bible

The Scriptures contain many predictions of events which occurred much later in history, in some cases, hundreds of years later. The prophecy of Micah, written over 750 years before Christ, predicted that Christ would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5: 2). Isaiah, also written 750 years before Christ, predicted that He would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14) and would perform miracles throughout His ministry (Isa. 35: 5-6 with Matt. 9: 35).

"But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Too* little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity." (Mic. 5:2 NASB)

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. (Isa. 7:14 NASB)

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.⁶ Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah. (Isaiah 35:5-6 NASB)

Christ's rejection by His countrymen, the Jews, is prophesied in Ps. 118:22 (cf. 1 Pet. 2:7) and His betrayal by Judas in Ps. 41: 9 (cf. Jn. 13: 18).

⁸⁸ Frame, p. 131

The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner *stone*. (Psalm 118:22 NASB)

Even my close friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me. (Psalm 41:9 NASB)

He was betrayed by Judas for the bribe of 30 pieces of silver (Matt. 26: 15; Matt. 27: 1-10 with Zech. 11: 12-13). He was mocked, beaten, spit upon, and pierced (Isa. 50: 6; Isa. 53:4-5; Ps. 22: 6-8 with Matt. 26: 67; 27: 31, 40-44). A very detailed description of the crucifixion is given in Ps. 22 hundreds of years before this method of execution even came into existence. It is a psalm of David written some 1,000 years before Christ. Of particular interest is vv. 7-8 compared with Matt. 27: 41-43.

Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.⁵ But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. (Isa. 53:4-5 NASB)

All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, *saying*,⁸ "Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him." (Psalm 22:7-8 NASB)

In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking *Him* and saying,⁴² "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him."⁴³ "HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE *Him* now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" (Matthew 27:41-43 NASB)

Christ was crucified with thieves (Isa. 53: 12 with Matt. 27: 38). His garments were divided among the Roman soldiers and lots were cast to see who would get His tunic (Ps. 22: 18 with Jn. 19: 23-24). His bones were not broken as was customary with all victims of crucifixion to hasten their deaths (Ps. 34: 20 with Jn. 19: 31-33). After His death, darkness fell over the land from about noon to three o'clock (Amos 8:9 with Matt. 27: 45). Although Christ was poor, He was buried in the tomb of a rich man (Isa. 53: 9 with Matt. 27: 57-60). His body was not allowed to decompose (decay) in the grave after His crucifixion (Ps. 16: 10 with Acts 2: 31).

I have limited our discussion to those prophecies about Christ which cannot be interpreted as self-fulfilled. There are many others which skeptics of the Bible could claim are contrived fulfillments which Jesus could have arranged Himself as a mere human. For example, in order to fulfill the prophecy of Ps. 78: 2, Jesus could have purposely spoken in parables (Matt. 13: 35). He purposely remained silent in the presence of His accusers (Isa. 53: 7 with Matt. 27: 12-19). He arranged for the donkey to transport Him into Jerusalem as a fulfillment of Zech. 9:9 (Matt. 21: 1-5). Many of His quotations from the prophets during His crucifixion could be interpreted as self-fulfillments of prophecy. Any human being familiar with the Bible could have fulfilled these prophecies.

This may be conceded, but such arguments do not explain other prophetic fulfillments—being born in Bethlehem, performing miracles which had no human explanation, his betrayal by Judas, His torture before and during crucifixion, Pilate's decision to allow His crucifixion, His garments

being divided, the derision of His enemies during the crucifixion, His burial in the tomb of a rich man, etc.

Humanly speaking, Jesus could not have arranged any of these fulfillments of prophecy, and the burden of proof lies on those who do not believe that predictive prophecy is possible. Most of the predictions which have been noted are referenced to events surrounding His execution, a time when Jesus was at the weakest point in His life and, therefore, in no position to manipulate prophetic fulfillments.⁸⁹ Of course, as the God-man, Jesus was perfectly in control of all the prophetic fulfillments concerning His life and death, but this is precisely the point being made. His life and death were supernaturally orchestrated.

this *Man*, delivered over by the **predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. (Acts 2:23 NASB)

"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, **both Herod and Pontius Pilate**, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,²⁸ **to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.** (Acts 4:27-28 NASB)

The predictive prophecy of the OT, of course, is not limited to prophecies of Jesus Christ. Other momentous events of Israel's history have been prophesied in the Bible, only a few of which will be noted here. The 430 years of Israel's slavery in Egypt are predicted in Gen. 15, roughly four hundred years before the exodus event. The decree of Cyrus, king of Persia, to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem was predicted in the prophecy of Isaiah about 150 years before Cyrus' birth (Isa. 44: 28-45: 1; Ezra 1: 1-3). The successive kingdoms of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, all of which affected the history of Israel, are prophesied in Daniel's dream along with the rise of another world empire, the kingdom of Christ, which will supplant and put an end to all the rival kingdoms of man (Dan. 2). Although it is admitted that none of these kingdoms except Babylon are actually named in the prophecy, the succession of kingdoms and the allusions given are too close to be accidental. They are so close, in fact, that liberal scholars unwilling to concede the possibility of predictive prophecy date Daniel during the period of the Maccabees from 165-40 BC, after the events had already taken place. The seventy years of Israel's captivity in Babylon are predicted and also their return to the land of Canaan (Jer. 25: 12 and Jer. 29: 10).

It is recognized that none of the predictive prophecy of the OT will be conclusive or convincing to someone who is committed, without sufficient reason, to the ultimate and final criterion (standard) of autonomous (independent) human reasoning. The Holy Spirit alone can convince the human mind of the authority of Scripture. At the same time, it should be pointed out that Scripture does not make irrational claims for itself. It does not invite us to take a blind leap of faith without any evidence to support its claims.

The Spirit certainly does persuade, but he persuades us to believe inherently rational content...the Spirit's work is not to persuade us of something for which there are no rational grounds, but rather to

⁸⁹ For further study, consult *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, "The Messianic Prophecies", Josh McDowell.

persuade us by illumining the rational grounds which obligate us to believe. Spirit-created faith is not “blind”.⁹⁰

B. The Unity of the Bible

The Bible was written during a period of 1500 years and under a multitude of economic, social and political circumstances by some forty or so different authors who came from a variety of backgrounds: kings, priests, prophets, farmers, physicians, fishermen, and political officials. One would think it impossible that such a variety of authors laboring under such different circumstances and spanning 1500 years could produce a book with any degree of coherency (unity of thought) much less 66 separate books which essentially have the same unifying theme. But the Bible is no ordinary book, and even though such a book is impossible with men, all things are possible with God.

Frank E. Gaebelin has identified the primary unity of the Bible not in the doctrinal teaching of the Bible, not in its literature, not in its typology or symbolism, not even in “the drama of redemption” which in some theological circles would be called the divine covenants.⁹¹ Rather, he finds the unity of the Bible in a person, the person of Jesus Christ, who was self-conscious that the OT Scriptures as a whole focused on His person and work. Jesus said that the OT Scriptures testified of Him (Jn. 5: 39) and that Moses wrote about Him in the first five books of the Bible (Jn. 5: 46).

"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; **it is these that testify about Me**; (Jn. 5:39 NASB)

"For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, **for he wrote about Me**. (Jn. 5:46 NASB)

He identified Himself as the stone which the builders rejected (Cf. Matt. 21: 42 with Ps. 118: 22-23) and the smitten shepherd whose sheep would be scattered (Cf. Zechariah: 13: 7 with Mark 14: 27). Added to this is the witness of all the prophets of which He reminded His two despairing disciples on the road to Emmaus.⁹²

And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!
²⁶ "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. (Lk. 24:25-27 NASB)

There is scarcely a page of the Bible on which we cannot find some direct or indirect reference to Christ. We see him in the seed of the woman in Gen. 3: 15 (cf. Rom. 16: 20); the sacrifice of Isaac in Gen. 22; the rejection of Joseph by his brothers in Gen. 37 and the explanation of his sufferings in Gen 50: 15-21; in the deliverance of Israel by Moses in Exodus 1-19; the giving of the Law in Exodus 20 (cf. Matt. 5—7); the sacrificial system in Leviticus (cf. Hebrews), the conquest and

⁹⁰ Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, p. 136. See also “The Argument from Prophecy” in the same book, pp. 136-140.

⁹¹ Of course, it cannot be denied that the Christological thread running through the Bible is structured in terms of covenantal arrangements with blessings and curses.

⁹² Frank Gaebelin, “The Unity of the Bible”, in *Revelation and the Bible*, Carl F. H. Henry, ed.

inheritance of Canaan in Joshua (cf. Matt. 5: 5); the rule of David (2 Sam. 7: 8-17), the wisdom of Solomon, the suffering of Job, a man who was **blameless** and **upright**; the Messianic Psalms (e.g. Ps. 22), and the servant passages of Isaiah (Isa. 42, Isa 61: 1-3; cf. Lk. 4: 17-19). Philip was able to lead the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ by explaining Isaiah 53. By tracing the history of Israel's rebellion, Stephen was able to refute and rebuke the scribes and Pharisees for failing to recognize their Messiah and for putting him to death (Acts 7).

Christ is evident in all the prophets who, according to Peter, **were seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow** (1Pet. 1: 11). Paul regularly used the OT Scriptures to reason with the Jews in the synagogues everywhere he went, proving from them that Jesus was the Christ who died and rose again (Acts 17: 1-3). The single thread running throughout the OT is the promise of salvation through the provision of a redeemer for God's fallen people. The NT gospels see the fulfillment of this promise in the physical reality of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection; and the epistles challenge us to live out the implications of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection in the here and now with a view to the glories which will certainly follow.

Sixty-six books, forty or so different authors, written during 1500 years of turbulent and brutal history, yet one unified story of the person of Christ. The Bible truly is a miracle of God's grace given for one main purpose—to reveal Jesus Christ, **“the way, the truth, and the life”**, as the only means of being right with God the Father (Jn. 14: 6).

VI. The Best Defense of the Bible—the Bible Itself

Thus far I have presented a rational defense for the authority of Scripture: the prediction of events hundreds of years before they took place, the unity of the Bible's message, the testimony of Jesus Christ, and the testimony of the apostles. A critic of the Bible could easily accuse me of using the Bible to defend the Bible rather than using “reliable” sources outside the Bible. To this accusation I would respond: Of course, because there is no higher, more reliable authority to which I can appeal to prove the authority of the Bible.

If I were trying to prove that the average heart rate for a man of fifty years old, weighing 180 pounds, is 60-70 beats per minute, I would appeal to the testimony of a cardiologist, or I would refer to a textbook in cardiology. But I am a Bible teacher, and obviously cardiologists know more about the physical organ of the human heart than a Bible teacher. If I wanted to determine the weight-bearing load of a concrete beam with steel reinforcements I would appeal to the authority of a structural engineer. But to whose authority do we appeal to determine whether the Bible is the word of God and, therefore, authoritative for our faith and practice?

Do we appeal to historians, archaeologists, scientists, linguists, mathematicians, or theologians? Which scientists or theologians among thousands should we consult? Are we confident enough in their ability to judge the reliability of Scriptures? The ultimate question really is this: Are we confident in their infallible ability to judge the reliability of the Scriptures? Or should it be the other way around? Should the Scriptures be allowed to judge the reliability of historical, archaeological, and scientific research?

Would we be willing to abandon our confidence in the Bible as the word of God if a famous historian produced evidence which “proved” that the Bible was historically inaccurate? What if several famous archaeologists demonstrated the historical inaccuracy of the Bible? Are we willing to abandon our belief in divine creation because Charles Darwin, a naturalist of the 19th century, proposed the theory of evolution supposedly proving that human beings evolved from lower life forms? The overwhelming majority of scientists today scoff at the idea of supernatural creation. If we are willing to yield our confidence in the Scriptures to the conventional wisdom of our day, wisdom which God has **made foolish** (1 Cor. 1: 20) and which the Apostle Paul called mere **speculations...raised up against the knowledge of God** (2 Cor. 10: 5), then what we have done is shifted our allegiance from the authority of the Bible to the “higher” authority of historians, scientists, and conventional human wisdom.

Today, most scientists and many theologians insist that a human being could never have risen from the dead. Such a thing, they insist, has never been observed in our day and, therefore, could never have happened in the past the way the Biblical writers described it. They were simply men of their times who wished to propagate the story of a mythological Jesus. Such a view fails to provide a reason why the Biblical writers would also be willing to be crucified upside down and have their heads chopped off for the mythological Jesus they fabricated.

We must understand that believing in the truth of Christianity is not like believing in any other religion. Many people suffer today for religions they believe to be true, including Muslims and Buddhists. But the suffering of the 11 apostles and the early Christian disciples is not the same thing. What modern skeptics are accusing them of doing is suffering for something they knew was false.

But secondly, Christianity is different from all other religions in that early Christianity exposed itself to empirical investigation. Christianity was empirically falsifiable. All that its critics had to do was prove that Jesus did not rise bodily from the grave, something which should have been a simple matter, given the fact that His tomb was one of the few “bench” tombs in Jerusalem carved out of rock, affordable to only a handful of people. Find the tomb, and you will also find the body. The case for Christianity is thus dismissed. They had their opportunity for disproving the resurrection, and they failed.

At this point in history, Christianity is NOT empirically falsifiable, nor can it be empirically proven. We are too far removed from the historical situation to prove empirically that Jesus was resurrected or not. Our proof today is the Bible, word of God, and the testimony of witnesses found therein. The skeptics will simply pull out the rationalist card and say, “Miracles cannot happen; therefore, the resurrection of Christ did not happen.” But that is not an argument. It is merely a statement of one’s opinion that miracles are impossible and that they never occurred in the past.

On the other hand, Hindus believe that man is trapped in an endless cycle of reincarnation in which he may live in the form of a human in one life but return as a cockroach or rat in the next life due to some infraction of the rules—what those rules are remains very vague. The goal is to escape this life and be absorbed into the world soul. Buddhism is somewhat similar in its goal, as are other eastern religions. How can we disprove such religious beliefs? They do not subject themselves to investigation. For the same reason, they cannot be proven true. Religions of this sort can neither

be proven nor disproven according to their own truth claims. They are not falsifiable and never have been. The convert simply “believes”.

Now, if Christianity is nonsense, then all the first-century skeptics had to do was produce Jesus’ lifeless body for all in Jerusalem to see. Either His body was discovered in the grave where it was laid or it was not. If it had been found, this would have been followed by loud public exposure of the fraud in the city streets of Jerusalem. But this never happened, even forty days after the crucifixion on the Day of Pentecost when Peter preached about the resurrection. If Peter was shouted to silence by reports of Jesus’ discovered body, it is odd that we have no historical evidence of this event. But the whole story at least loaned itself to historical investigation. Other religious claims never have. They depend, instead, on the internal consistency of their written documents. Two thousand years later, Christianity depends on the internal consistency of the Bible and the internal witness of the Holy Spirit.

Almost fifty years ago, F.F. Bruce warned the evangelical community of putting too much emphasis upon external evidences outside the Bible. Speaking particularly of archaeological research, he said,

Generally speaking, “confirmation” is not the best word to use of the bearing of archaeology on the New Testament. In fact, in both Testaments it is better to regard archaeology as illustrative than as confirmatory....

Archaeology may illuminate the historical context in which he [Christ] was manifested in flesh, but how could it confirm the claim that life and salvation are available as God’s free gift to those who believe in him?...it is not by means of archaeology that the revelation itself is apprehended as truth.⁹³

John Frame suggests that external evidence for the authority of the Bible is helpful at points because it sometimes agrees with the data of Scripture. He uses the historical work of Josephus, an unbelieving Jewish scholar, as an example of scholarship which occasionally recognized Biblical testimony. However, Josephus does not in any way add any weight to the fact that the Bible is the word of God. This would be like adding weight to an elephant with a speck of dust.

I conclude that we may use extrabiblical data in apologetics, but not as independent criteria to which Scripture must measure up. How ridiculous it would be to imagine that God’s Word must be considered false if it fails to agree with Josephus or Eusebius or Papias—or with some anthropologist’s theories about “early man”! Precisely the opposite is the case. We would simply present Scripture as it is, that is, as sometimes agreeing with other writings and sometimes not.⁹⁴

John Murray contributes to this line of argumentation by saying:

We say Scripture is infallible not because we can prove it [that is, prove empirically or scientifically, D.M.] to be infallible. The impossibility of proof lies on the face of Scripture. For example, how could we prove that the first chapter of Genesis is substantially true, not to speak of its being infallible? This chapter deals with the origin of created realities, and what collateral or independent evidence do we

⁹³F.F. Bruce, *Revelation and the Bible*, pp. 330-331

⁹⁴ Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, pp. 20-21

possess regarding the action by which created entities began to be? ...Or again, if we think of the third chapter of Genesis, who can prove that the events there recorded are true, or that it provides us with an infallible account of what is alleged to have occurred?

...How could we prove that when Christ died upon the cross he expiated the sins of a countless number of lost men? How are we to prove that Christ after his ascension entered into the holy places at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens? It can be demonstrated that the Scripture so teaches but not that these things are true [i.e. empirically verifiable, D.M.].

Thus, on the question of warrant for the proposition that Scripture is infallible, what are we to say? The only ground is the witness of Scripture itself, to its own origin, character, and authority.

This may seem an illegitimate way of supporting the proposition at issue. Are we not begging the question? We are seeking for the ground of the proposition that Scripture is infallible. And then we say: we believe this because the Scripture says so, which, in turn, assumes that we are to accept the verdict of Scripture. If we accept this verdict, we imply that its verdict is true, and not only so, but *infallibly true* if the verdict is to support the declaration that Scripture is infallible. This is the situation and we must frankly confess it to be so. It can be no otherwise in the situation that belongs to us in God's providential grace....

If we do not accept its verdict respecting its own character or quality, we have no warrant to accept its verdict respecting anything else. If its witness respecting itself is not authentic, then by what warrant may we accept its witness on other matters?⁹⁵

John Calvin, the greatest theologian of the Reformation, said over 500 years ago, “But those who wish to prove to unbelievers that Scripture is the Word of God are acting foolishly, for only by faith can this be known.” This statement can be misleading if taken out of context, for the very same chapter of his *Institutes* is devoted to proofs of the credibility of the Scriptures. He also says in the same section:

There are other reasons [than those mentioned in chapter 8, D.M.], neither few nor weak, for which the dignity and majesty of Scripture are not only affirmed in godly hearts, but brilliantly vindicated against the wiles of its disparagers [those who do not respect the Bible, D.M.]; yet of themselves these are not strong enough to provide a firm faith, until our Heavenly Father, revealing his majesty there, lifts reverence for Scripture beyond the realm of controversy. Therefore Scripture will ultimately suffice for a saving knowledge of God only when its certainty is founded upon inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, these human testimonies which exist to confirm it will not be vain if, as secondary aids to our feebleness, they follow that chief and highest testimony.⁹⁶

What follows is Calvin's statement—quoted above—about the futility of “proving” to unbelievers that the Scriptures are the word of God.

⁹⁵ John Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. 1, pp. 9-12, emphasis his

⁹⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (1.8.13), emphasis mine

VII. The Internal Witness of the Holy Spirit

We have many references in Scripture to the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us that the gospel is hidden to those who are perishing, but in those who believe, the light has shone to reveal the glory of Christ.

³And even if our gospel is veiled, **it is veiled to those who are perishing**, ⁴ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is **the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.** (2 Cor. 4:3-6 NASB)

In 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Paul rejoices that the gospel had come to the Thessalonians in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. In Romans and Galatians we learn that God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son, Jesus Christ, to produce in us a special relationship to God which Paul calls adoption (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15-16). The apostle John tells us about the anointing we have from the Holy One by which we know the truth and are able to discern truth from error, an anointing which abides in us (1 Jn. 2: 18-27).

Without the work of the Holy Spirit, the Bible will not be believed. The classic text demonstrating this fact is found in 1 Corinthians 2. In v. 4 Paul says his message went forth **in demonstration of the Spirit and of power**. This was so, in order that their faith should not rest on human wisdom, that is, on rational arguments of learned men unaided by the Holy Spirit. In v. 8 he says that the rulers of this age had not understood the wisdom of God; otherwise, they would not have crucified Christ; and in v. 9 we learn that man cannot imagine the wonderful things that God has prepared for those who love Him. The reason man cannot imagine them is that such things are revealed only through the Holy Spirit (v.10). Just as only a man can read his own mind (that is, no other man can read it), even so only God can read God's mind.

But the Holy Spirit is given to us so that we can, in some limited sense, read the mind of God—not exhaustively, but sufficiently. This thought comes out in vv. 11 and 12, especially in v. 12 where he says we have received the Spirit from God that we might know the things which are freely given to us by God, things which are taught by the Spirit. Verse 14 gives us the reason why the Bible is a dead letter to those unaided by the Spirit.

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. ¹⁶ For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:10-16 NASB)

The natural man (cf. James 3:15), or the unsaved man, does not accept the things of God's Spirit. They are nothing but foolishness to him (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-27), and he cannot understand them because he does not have the spiritual equipment to understand them. Such enabling comes only from God. Christians, on the other hand, have the mind of Christ (v.16), not exhaustively, but sufficiently to discern spiritual truth. Paul's teaching in this passage is akin to Jesus' words to

Nicodemus in Jn. 3 when He says, “...**unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**” Unless you are born again you cannot understand or appreciate the kingdom of God.

Jesus also praised His Father for hiding the truth from the self-proclaimed wise men of his day and for revealing the truth to simple people whom He called “**babes**” (Matt. 11: 25). The doxology is made against the backdrop of the unrepentant cities of Bethsaida and Chorazin where many miracles had been performed. This is proof that even the miraculous deeds of Jesus could not be understood—interpreted, if you will—by human reasoning alone, nor could they be discerned through empirical proof. Jesus’ miracles were **clearly seen** (Rom. 1: 20) by those who witnessed them, yet they remained in unbelief. Romans 3:11 proclaims that there is none who understands and none who seeks for God among the Greeks or Jews who are still unconverted. It is clear that if understanding comes, it must come from some source outside of man.

When Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ (Matt. 16:13-17), Jesus immediately informed him that such truth was not revealed to him by flesh and blood, that is, by natural man with human reasoning, but by His Father in heaven. Peter could never have come to that conclusion otherwise. We learn from this passage and others that the gospel is not comprehended with human reason and intellect alone, but by the mind and heart which has been aided by God, regenerated and washed by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5; Matt.11: 25-27).

Nothing that has been said thus far should be interpreted to mean that the authority of Scripture is merely subjective and depends upon the “faith-response” of the individual who reads or hears the Word of God. This was the error of Karl Barth, a German theologian of the 20th century who maintained that “the true nature and meaning of biblical inspiration is to be found in the church’s belief-ful subjection to the Bible as the Word of God.”⁹⁷

In Barth’s system, the authority of Scripture is conditioned (dependent) upon man’s personal response to the Scriptures. The Bible “becomes” the word of God in the existential moment of belief. Upon this view, the general revelation of God in creation is denied since all revelation is saving revelation. Man can no longer be held accountable for his rejection of the revelation of God in creation for the simple reason that unless he responds to this revelation in faith it is not, by definition, revelation. It is his faith, subjectively applied to revelation, which validates (makes truthful) the revelation. Carl Henry further observes that, based upon this premise (assumption), only those portions of the Bible which have “imposed” themselves upon the human heart “become the Word of God, and these cease to be the Word of God when not self-imposing. What is Word of God for some need not be Word of God for others...”⁹⁸

One can see the implications of this view for apologetics (the defense of the gospel). The one who agrees with Barth believes that Scripture is left without any recourse to external arguments—i.e. external to one’s subjective experience—for supporting the truth-claims of the Bible. Any other document which “imposes” itself upon the human heart must be appreciated to have equal validity to the Scriptures—the Quran or the Upanishads⁹⁹ for example.

⁹⁷ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. IV, p. 258

⁹⁸ Henry, pp. 259-260

⁹⁹ The “Bible” of Hinduism

Evangelical theologians believe that the inspiration and authority of the Bible is objective and independent of any human response to it. It is the Word of God whether anyone believes it or not. Even if the Bible had never had an impact upon a single human being, something which not even the most adamant skeptic would claim, it would still be the Word of God. The necessity of the Spirit's operation in the human heart simply means that this objective Word cannot be appreciated or recognized as the Word of God without the illumination of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's work is not limited to the inspiration of human authors of the Bible but is necessary for the human audience of the Bible as well. While the Spirit's inspiration of the original writers has ceased with the completion of Scripture, the subjective illumination of each reader is an ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit.

R.C. Sproul gives a helpful analysis of the testimony of the Spirit (illumination) in light of the existential trends of Barth's theology mentioned above.

The effect of the internal testimony [of the Spirit] is that the believer acquiesces [consents without protest] to Scripture. The internal testimony offers no new argument or content to the evidence found in Scripture objectively, but so works in our hearts that we are willing to submit to what is already there.

...The *testimonium* [testimony of the Spirit] does not function either against the evidence or apart from the evidence but produces *acquiescence* to the evidence. The Scripture objectively gives evidence that it is the Word of God. The Spirit does not prove true what gives evidence of being false but rather gives us the quiet assurance that the evidence is certain. The Spirit causes us to submit or yield to the evidence. Our yielding is a subjective act to an objective basis of evidence.¹⁰⁰

In the same essay, Sproul cites several key passages of Scripture which illustrate the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the heart and mind of the believer.¹⁰¹ In 2 Corinthians 4: 3-6, Paul contrasts the spiritual blindness of those who are “unbelieving” with the spiritual “light” which belongs to those who believe.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,⁴ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.⁵ For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.⁶ For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:3-6 NASB)

This text reveals the fundamental cause of the difference between believer and unbeliever; it is not found in the individuals themselves, but in the work of two opposing spiritual forces. Satan has blinded the minds of the unbelieving while God has illumined the minds of believers. This illumination is the effective cause of their belief. Darkness and light are repeatedly used in Scripture as synonyms for the spiritual state of those who are lost and those who are saved.

¹⁰⁰ R.C. Sproul, “The Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit,” *Inerrancy*, Norman L. Geisler, ed., pp. 342-343, emphasis his.

¹⁰¹ Sproul, p. 353

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, (Col. 1:13 NASB)

⁵for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (Eph. 5:8 NASB)

⁹But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (1 Pet. 2:9 NASB)

⁵The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (Jn. 1:5 NASB)

The gospel which Paul preached to the Thessalonians came with the attendant power of the Holy Spirit which produced the full conviction and exemplary conduct of the Christians in Thessalonica.

⁵for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. ⁹For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, (1 Thess. 1:5-9 NASB)

Paul exhorts the Philippian to **work out your salvation with fear and trembling** with the full assurance that God is presently and continuously working in them **both to will and to work for His good pleasure** (Phil. 2: 12-13). What God has begun with the Spirit, He will also complete with the Spirit (Phil. 1: 6). He does this in all believers through the ministry of the Holy Spirit who illumines the Scriptures so that we might know the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2: 6-16).

In His illuminating work, the Spirit does not act apart from the Word of God. He does not impart new truth to the believer but makes the truth of the Bible understandable, convincing, and applicable to the believer through a variety of circumstances and means. This does not imply that the unbeliever cannot intellectually understand the truth claims of the Bible. The words of Scripture can convey the thought that Christ was born of a virgin, that He was God, that He died for our sins, that he rose again from the dead, etc. All of this is plain enough grammatically from the Bible. Nevertheless, the Spirit is necessary to convince the reader that these things are true.

VIII. The Perspicuity (Clarity) of Scripture

WCF 1.7 All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all;(1) yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.(2)

(1) 2 Pet. 3:16.

(2) Ps. 119:105,130. (WCF 1:7 WCS)¹⁰²

The Westminster Confession of Faith says that although not all Scripture is clear, those things which are necessary for one's salvation are clear even to the "unlearned", those who are not educated. This would include small children and those who are moderately mentally handicapped who can understand simple language. Infants and the severely mentally handicapped require the im-mediate operation of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk. 1: 41-44) as opposed to the mediate operation of the Spirit working through the means of the Scriptures and the preached word.

In other words, one need not be a systematic theologian to be saved. Based upon our previous discussion, we have seen that unless the Spirit illumines the mind, even the most intelligent, educated biblical scholars may remain blind to the truth found in the Scriptures. The testimony of Scripture indicates that the content of one's knowledge may be very simple to be sufficient for salvation, illustrated by Luke's narrative of the thief on the cross.

Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS."³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!"⁴⁰ But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"⁴¹ "And we indeed *are suffering* justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."⁴² And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"⁴³ And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." (Lk. 23:38-43 NASB)

The Bible does not give us much information about what this thief believed about Jesus. From the text, we may deduce that:

- (1) He believed, along with the skeptical thief on the other side, that Jesus claimed to be **the Christ** or the long-awaited Messiah. Luke does not make it clear how they knew about this claim, but by this time, Jesus was a publicly known figure.
- (2) He believed that his punishment was justly deserved but that Jesus was innocent of wrongdoing and was suffering unjustly (v. 41).
- (3) He believed that Jesus' claim to being "**the king of the Jews**" was true, a message attached by Pilate to the cross (Jn. 19: 19); for he says, "**Remember me when you come in your kingdom.**"
- (4) This same request, "**Remember me when you come in your kingdom**", proves that he believed that Jesus would rise from the dead. It is unlikely that the thief believed Jesus would somehow survive the ordeal of crucifixion; no one ever did. This leaves only the option that he believed Jesus had power over death. This is remarkable, since even Jesus' disciples didn't seem to understand this, and didn't believe the testimony of the women who first witnessed the risen Christ.
- (5) He trusted that Jesus also had the power to forgive him of his sins and the power to raise him from the dead, as well; otherwise, there would be no benefit in being remembered.

We could think of many other truths embraced by the thief, but these will do. Jesus' response to him proves that whatever it was that the thief believed was sufficient for salvation: "**Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.**"

¹⁰² Copied and pasted from *BibleWorks 10* software.

Did the thief also believe Jesus was God? That He was the second person of the Trinity? That God had predestined all things that come to pass, even his and Jesus' crucifixion? Not likely, but we lack the historical context of how much he was exposed to the ministry and teaching of Jesus. What we do know is that God communicated to the thief whatever truth was necessary to save him. We also know that he was one of God's elect unto salvation chosen in Christ **before the foundation of the world** (Eph. 1: 4). Moreover, God in His sovereign grace chose not merely the thief but also the means by which the thief would be saved, namely, exposure to Christ by being crucified beside Him. If God elects someone to salvation, He also elects or chooses the means or method by which he will be saved. This method is person variable; that is, the exposure to the truth of God is different for each person. It was different for those who came to faith in the OT, during Christ's ministry, or today in the church age. It is also different in some sense or another for every single person who is chosen, for the circumstances leading to faith are all variable according to persons. None of us met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, and none of us were crucified beside Jesus. We meet Christ in the midst of our unique life circumstances.

But one thing is the same. The communication which saved all OT and NT believers is communication about the true God, not some other god. We were not saved through the knowledge of Allah, Vishnu, or any other so-called God, any more than the Israelites could be saved through the knowledge of Baal or Molech, for God will not share His glory with another god. If God is sovereign; and if God is the one who chooses the elect according to His will, then the information received will be specifically about Him. God is not limited in His ability or opportunity to communicate the truth to any individual whom He chooses, and it is inconceivable—not to mention out of accord with anything taught in Scripture—for Him to choose the elect in the “name” of another god because of any presumed limitations in His communication. Imagine God saying, “Well, since this person will never hear about my Son, Jesus Christ, I must save him another way. I will contextualize the means of salvation to fit the unreached culture in which he lives, whether Saudi Arabia, Tibet, Cambodia, or Afghanistan. If he sincerely believes in Allah, Buddha, or some Hindu god, this will have to do.” No. God hates the name of any other god.

¹³“Now concerning everything which I have said to you, be on your guard; and **do not mention the name of other gods, nor let them be heard from your mouth.** (Exod. 23:13 NASB)

¹⁴—for you shall not worship **any other god**, for the LORD, **whose name is Jealous**, is a jealous God (Exod. 34:14 NASB)

²¹You shall not give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech, **nor shall you profane the name of your God**; I am the LORD. (Lev. 18:21 NASB)

²⁰But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks **in the name of other gods**, that prophet shall die.' (Deut. 18:20 NASB)

¹⁵“If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve **the LORD [Yahweh]**, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, **we will serve the LORD.**” (Jos. 24:15 NASB)

⁸"I am the LORD [*Yahweh*], **that is My name; I will not give My glory to another**, Nor My praise to graven images. (Isa. 42:8 NASB)

⁹"**For the sake of My name** I delay My wrath, And *for* My praise I restrain *it* for you, In order not to cut you off. ¹⁰"Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.

¹¹"For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; **For how can *My name* be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.** (Isa. 48:9-11 NASB)

¹⁷For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, **AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH.**" (Rom. 9:17 NASB)

¹²"And there is salvation in no one else; for there is **no other name** under heaven that has been given among men **by which we must be saved.**" (Acts 4:12 NASB)

¹³for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON **THE NAME OF THE LORD** WILL BE SAVED." (Rom. 10:13 NASB)

⁹For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him **the name which is above every name**, ¹⁰so that **at the name of Jesus** EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and that every tongue will confess that **Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9-11 NASB)

What was the beginning of Jesus' model prayer?

"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, **Hallowed be Your name.** (Matt. 6:9 NASB)

One may argue that this restriction abandons the majority of the world's present population to hell, for the gospel of Jesus Christ has not been proclaimed to billions of people. Quite true, but this is not a limitation upon God but an accusation against His unfaithful church who was commissioned with this responsibility 2000 years ago but has not fulfilled it (Matt. 28: 18-20). Nevertheless, God is not wringing His hands in frustration for our unfaithfulness, helpless to do anything about it. Rather, He is accomplishing His ordained will to save the ones He has chosen through the only appointed means clearly revealed in Scripture, the proclamation of the gospel. He is also accomplishing His ordained will to leave others to perish in their sinful disobedience (Rom. 9)—disobedience either to the unwritten word in creation (Rom. 1: 18-32) or disobedience to the written word of the gospel (Rom. 1: 16; 10: 6-13). Both the unwritten and written word are sufficiently clear to leave all men without excuse. Frame asks,

Does Scripture warrant this doctrine of the clarity of God's written Word?

I will consider this question in terms of the lordship attributes. First, in relation to God's *control*: God is fully in control of his communications to human beings. When he intends to communicate with a human being, he is always able to do it successfully. But another name for successful communication is *clarity*. An unclear word is one that does not succeed, that fails to accomplish its purpose. But we know that God's word always accomplishes its purpose (Isa. 55: 10-11). Therefore, his word is always clear.

["For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; ¹¹ So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, **Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.** (Isa. 55:10-11 NASB)]

Why then, do people fail to understand God's word? The ultimate answer is that God did not intend for them to understand. Note again God's commission to Isaiah, in 6: 9-10.

[He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.' (Isa. 6:9 NASB)]

God's word in Isaiah's mouth, oddly enough, brings dullness and a lack of understanding, not complete understanding. Jesus quotes this saying in Matthew 13: 14-15 to explain why he speaks in parables. Note also verses 10-13:

["In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; ¹⁵ FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.' (Matt. 13:14-15 NASB)]

¹⁰Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" ¹¹ And he answered them, "**To you it has been given** to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, **but to them it has not been given.** ¹² For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

Jesus says here that he intentionally speaks in parables, which enlighten the disciples as to the mysteries of the kingdom, but hide those mysteries from those outside the circle. His words are clear to one group, unclear to another. They have exactly the power he intends them to have. He intends to communicate to one group, so to them his word must be clear. To the other group, he does not intend to fully communicate; so to them the word is not clear ["Not clear" in this context means not understood. Frame does not mean unintelligible or confusing since this would contradict what he has been saying all along about the "clarity" of Scripture. D.M.]

But "those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation," that knowledge by which we ascertain the authenticity of a person's Christian profession, is known by, or attainable by, all believers. Many have that knowledge by the age of six; others take longer. Few have such knowledge by age one or two. But those who belong to Jesus are able to attain such knowledge (sometimes over a period of years) "in a due use of the ordinary means."

The clarity of the Word, therefore, is selective. It is for some, not all. It is for those with whom God intends to fully communicate.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Frame, *DWG*, pp. 204-205, underlined emphasis mine.

Frame goes on to explain that the clarity of scripture also relates to God's attribute of lordship. Rom. 1: 19-20 indicates that the unwritten word of God exhibited in natural creation obligates men to believe in the true God.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,¹⁹ because **that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.**²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, **have been clearly seen**, being understood through what has been made, **so that they are without excuse.** (Rom. 1:18-20 NASB)

In the same way that men are **without excuse** for refusing to acknowledge the true God—not just any god—through an observation of nature (the unwritten word), so also whenever someone encounters the written Word by reading it or hearing it read or preached, such an encounter obligates them to believe what they have read or heard. Of course, every reader or hearer of the Word will understand it at a different level according to his or her cognitive ability. The unbelieving nuclear physicist will surely understand more of the grammar, logic, and narrative of the Bible than a six-year-old. Each person exposed to the Word will therefore have different levels of obligation to believe what it says, considering, of course, the complexities of interpreting the Bible.¹⁰⁴

Christ differentiated the levels of obligation when He told the parable of the servants in Lk. 12.¹⁰⁵

"And that slave **who knew his master's will** and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes,⁴⁸ but the one **who did not know it**, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. **From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.** (Lk. 12:47-48 NASB)

In this parable, Jesus assumes that the master's instructions to his slaves are clear, not unclear. The greater the knowledge of God's word, the greater the obligation to believe it and obey it. Those who will never have the privilege of hearing the gospel will not be held responsible for believing something they have never heard, but they will be held responsible for suppressing the unwritten word of God clearly seen in general revelation. For this act of conscious disobedience, they are **without excuse** (Rom. 1: 20). Those who hear the gospel twice will be held more responsible for believing it than those who hear it only once, and unbelievers who have grown up in committed Christian homes will be held more responsible for their unbelief than those who grew up in nominally Christian homes. And so on.

"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! **For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.**²² "Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. (Matt. 11:21-22 NASB)

Jesus did not say that Tyre and Sidon would not be judged. He simply said that their judgment would be mitigated (lessened) because of lack of opportunity. Chorazin, on the other hand, had the

¹⁰⁴ DWG, pp. 206-207.

¹⁰⁵ Cited in DWG, p. 206.

opportunity to experience Jesus' miracles and repent. Moreover, Jesus expresses His knowledge of unrealized future events if conditions had been different. Tyre and Sidon **would have repented** if they had received the opportunities of Chorazin, but they didn't receive them.

As Isaiah said, God's word always accomplishes God's purposes, whether for blessing or cursing. And for God to be just in His punishments, His word of obligation must be clear or intelligible. The apostle Paul believed that the Athenian philosophers were obligated to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and **should** therefore, **repent**.

"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, **God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent**,³¹ because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, **having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.**" (Acts 17:30-31 NASB)

This is a remarkable statement bringing up many questions. Were the Greeks, living 780 miles from Jerusalem and without access to modern media, aware of the events that took place 20 years earlier? How could Paul say that God provided **proof to all men [including the Athenians?] by raising Him from the dead**? Perhaps we may assume that news of the crucifixion and reports of the resurrection had already reached Athens by this time. This is a reasonable assumption after 20 years; and certainly Jerusalem, a "powder keg" of political unrest, was well-known as a cross-road for commercial activity until it was destroyed in 70 AD. Whatever happened in Jerusalem became international news, as it also continues to be to this day. In his defense before Festus and Agrippa, Paul appealed to Agrippa's awareness that the events of the crucifixion and resurrection had been a public occurrence for all to see, not one **done in a corner**. Moreover, the OT prophetic witness to these events, a witness familiar to Agrippa, was proof that Christ was the messianic fulfillment of their predictions. Undaunted by Festus' attempt to dismiss his testimony as religious fanaticism, Paul appeals to the undeniable fact of the resurrection and its OT predictions.

"So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, **stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place;**²³ **that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.**"²⁴ While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! *Your* great learning is driving you mad."²⁵ But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth."²⁶ "For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, **since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.**"²⁷ "King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do."²⁸ Agrippa *replied* to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." (Acts 26:22-28 NASB)

At any rate, Paul believed that the undeniable evidence of the resurrection obligated men to believe. Likewise, the narratives of the gospels reporting the resurrection are clear enough to create this same obligation today among those who are mentally competent to understand them.

IX. The Sufficiency of Scripture (Sola Scriptura)

The Scriptures, consisting of 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, are all we need to come to

a saving knowledge of Christ and to live an obedient life. Since they are sufficient for our needs and for the publication of God's glory in salvation history, no other additional written words are permitted to be added to Scripture. The Westminster Confession reads,

WCF 1.6 The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.(1) Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word;(2) and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.(3)

(1) 2 Tim. 3:15,16,17; Gal. 1:8,9; 2 Thess. 2:2.

(2) John 6:45; 1 Cor. 2:9,10,11,12.

(3) 1 Cor. 11:13,14; 1 Cor. 14:26,40. (WCF 1:6 WCS)¹⁰⁶

A. The Inscriptural Curse

Covenant documents of the ancient Near East commonly included an inscriptional curse forbidding anyone to add words to a document or take words away from the document. We find this kind of inscription in Deuteronomy and Proverbs.

"Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.² **You shall not add to the word** which I am commanding you, **nor take away from it**, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. (Deut. 4:1-2 NASB)

'But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' (Deut. 18:20 NASB)

"Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; **you shall not add to nor take away from it.** (Deut. 12:32 NASB)

Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.⁶ **Do not add to His words** Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar. (Prov. 30:5-6 NASB)

The false prophet who claimed to speak in the name of the Lord had essentially added to God's words and would therefore receive the curse of death for speaking **presumptuously** in the name of the Lord, as if the Lord Himself had spoken when, in fact, He had not spoken. He had added to the word of God. Although Deut. 4: 1-2 and 12: 32 speak specifically about additions or subtractions to the Law of God, Proverbs 30: 5-6 broadens the application to all of God's words.¹⁰⁷ Jeremiah pronounces the curse of death upon Hananiah the prophet for falsely prophesying the

¹⁰⁶ From *BibleWorks*

¹⁰⁷ Frame, *DWG*, p. 242.

return of Israel from Babylonian captivity after two years when Jeremiah had prophesied seventy years.

"For thus says the LORD, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. (Jer. 29:10 NASB)

Now in the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, in the fifth month, Hananiah the son of Azzur, the prophet, who was from Gibeon, spoke to me in the house of the LORD in the presence of the priests and all the people, saying, ²"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. ³**'Within two years** I am going to bring back to this place all the vessels of the LORD'S house, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon. (Jer. 28:1-3 NASB)

Then Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah the prophet, "Listen now, Hananiah, **the LORD has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie.** ¹⁶"Therefore thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. **This year you are going to die,** because you have counseled rebellion against the LORD.'" ¹⁷ **So Hananiah the prophet died in the same year** in the seventh month. (Jer. 28:15-17 NASB)

Also in Jeremiah we have a narrative example of what happens to anyone, even a king, who takes away God's words. The scroll dictated by Jeremiah to Baruch concerning the exile of Judah was read in the presence of King Jehoiakim who proceeded to cut it in pieces and burn it in an open fire pot.

"And concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah you shall say, 'Thus says the LORD, "**You have burned this scroll,** saying, 'Why have you written on it that the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land, and will make man and beast to cease from it?'" ³⁰"Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah, "**He shall have no one to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat of the day and the frost of the night.** (Jer. 36:29-30 NASB)

The NT also consists of God's covenant word or document for His people. At the end of Revelation, we find the inscriptional curse against adding to or taking away from the word.

¹⁸I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: **if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book;** ¹⁹and **if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life** and from the holy city, which are written in this book. (Rev. 22:18-19 NASB)

One may argue that this curse in Revelation pertains only to those who add to or take away from the book of Revelation. This may be true, but coming as it does at the end of God's inspired word in the Bible, it coordinates with Deuteronomy 4 and 12 at the beginning of the written word—Moses as the Bible's first human author—as the second part of an *inclusio* for the entire written word of God. An *inclusio* is a literary device at the beginning and ending of a statement, paragraph, or narrative, serving to enclose everything found in the body of the literary material. Biblical writers use it often for emphasis. Based on the positioning of the inscriptional warning in Deuteronomy 4 and 12 at the beginning of God's written word and the same warning at the end, we have strong evidence that the warning against adding to or taking from applies to every word

of God between the Pentateuch and Revelation. The whole Bible is God’s covenant document with His people, and Rev. 22 is an ancient inscriptional warning not to tamper with any of it.¹⁰⁸

A—Deuteronomy 4 and 12 (Do not add to or take away from My Words)

B—Old and New Testament Covenant Documents—the Old and New Testaments (My Words)

A—Revelation 22 (Do not add to or take away from My Words)

In the context of our discussion concerning “sufficiency”, it seems as if God is emphasizing that we should expect no more divine words other than those contained between Genesis and Revelation. And, indeed, for the last 2000 years, we have had no additional words that have been received by the whole church, although the Roman Catholic Church has added apocryphal literature, some of which contradicts biblical teaching, to justify some of its non-scriptural practices like prayers for the dead and purgatory, a transitional place between heaven and earth where sinners can atone for their sins committed after baptism. (see “Traditions” below).

The question also arises: What about other words added to the Scriptures after Moses? The prohibition of adding words applies only to human words. God has seen fit to add many words to the covenant documents of the OT and the NT written by those who were inspired by God through His Holy Spirit. Such words are human, but also divine. Therefore, the prohibition does not apply to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Solomon (Proverbs), and the 34 books of the OT in addition to the five books of Moses and the 27 books of the NT.

B. Ecclesiastical Traditions and New Revelations of the Spirit

1. Ecclesiastical Traditions

Every believer has been influenced to some degree or another by his ecclesiastical history. Sometimes, this history has had the tendency to distort or supplant the teaching of the Scriptures. Recognizing this potential, the authors of the Westminster Confession state,

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down **in Scripture**, or by good and necessary consequence **may be deduced from Scripture**: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

The WCF is a reformed “tradition”, but by its own admission, it does not have, nor will ever have, the authority of Scripture. Those of us who adhere to the reformed tradition must remember this and avoid the error of elevating our theological traditions to the same status as Scripture. Although there many differences between Protestants and Roman Catholics, there is but one fundamental difference which produces all the others. Loraine Boettner pinpoints this difference.

Protestantism and Roman Catholicism comes to a head regarding the question of authority. Right here, we believe, is *the basic difference between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism*. And, we may

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Frame, *DWG*, p. 242, footnote 5.

add, we believe that in this use of tradition is to be found the Achilles heel [*fatal weakness, D.M.*] of Roman Catholicism. For it is in this that Romanism finds the authority for its distinctive doctrines.¹⁰⁹

Roman Catholicism views the authority of tradition and the magisterium as equal to that of Scripture. Thus, instead of *sola scriptura*, “scripture alone”, there is the three-fold source of authority: Scripture, the magisterium, and tradition. The magisterium is the teaching authority of the church residing in the pope and bishops of the church. However, the interpretation of both tradition and scripture is in the hands of the magisterium; therefore, the RCC has essentially one authority, that of the magisterium—*sola magisterium*. Tradition and Scripture teach what the magisterium says they teach, nothing more and nothing less. The Council of Trent (1546 AD) Session IV, declared,

Furthermore, in order to restrain petulant [*ill-tempered, D.M.*] spirits, It decrees, that no one, relying on his own skill, shall—in matters of faith, and of morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine—wresting the sacred Scripture to his own senses, presume to interpret the said sacred Scripture contrary to that sense which holy mother Church—whose it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the holy Scriptures—hath held and doth hold; or even contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers; even though such interpretations were never (intended) to be at any time published. Contraveners shall be made known by their Ordinaries, and be punished with the penalties by law established.

In the Vatican Council of 1870 (Vatican I), the pope was declared to be infallible when speaking in his official capacity as pope (*ex cathedra*). Centuries of popes before Pope Pius IX (9th) did not officially claim this gift of infallibility, and few have actually used it since then. However, papal infallibility had been the unofficial tradition of the RCC long before Vatican I. For example, the immaculate conception of Mary (see below) was declared a church doctrine by Pope Pius IX in 1854, and the infallibility of the pope was so ingrained in RC tradition by 1870 that there was very thin resistance to it by hundreds of bishops attending Vatican I.¹¹⁰

Note also that papal infallibility applies only to the pope’s pronouncements on the “faith and morals” of the church. But what else is there? Faith pertains to the doctrinal standards of the church and morals pertains to its practice. Therefore, essentially nothing pertaining to what Christians must believe and do is omitted from papal infallibility.¹¹¹ Papal infallibility (Vatican I) was so thoroughly embraced by the church that it was surprising to Roman Catholics world-wide that Vatican II was announced in 1959—later convened from 1962-1967—simply because it was assumed that no further councils would be necessary. As Boettner says,

That the Vatican Council does mark a turning point in the history of the Roman Church is clear. For centuries the popes avoided church councils like the plague, because they regarded them as rivals to their own authority. But the Vatican Council [of 1870] changed all of that by making absolute the pope’s power and thus making all councils practically superfluous [unnecessary].¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, p. 73.

¹¹⁰ gotquestions.org

¹¹¹ Boettner, p. 236.

¹¹² Boettner, p. 247, emphasis mine. “superfluous” means unnecessary.

There are many Roman Catholic articles on the internet defending this doctrine and answering “misunderstandings” of it. Below is one example.

The Catholic Church’s teaching on papal infallibility is one that is generally misunderstood by those outside the Church. In particular, Fundamentalists and other “Bible Christians” often confuse the charism of papal “infallibility” with “impeccability.” They imagine Catholics believe the pope cannot sin. Others, who avoid this elementary blunder, think the pope relies on some sort of amulet or magical incantation when an infallible definition is due.

In this statement, “fundamentalists” are diminished as ignorant people who cannot discern the difference between sinlessness and infallibility or who accuse the pope of using magic—something I’ve not heard of in all my 72 years.

The author never defines “fundamentalists” in this article, but I am assuming he is referring to Christians who often shun reason and, historically, have had little time for the social implications of the gospel—feeding the poor, political activism, etc.—which take time away from evangelism and the preaching of the gospel.¹¹³ One can see the difference here between what has been known historically as fundamentalism of the early 20th century and evangelicalism—for which Packer argues—which stresses not only true preaching and evangelism but also biblical scholarship and the ministry of mercy around the globe.

Contrary to the Council of Trent’s position on private interpretation, the Reformation of the 16th century promoted a spirit of individual inquiry by all believers to study the bible for themselves and come to a personal persuasion of its truths—as per the doctrine of clarity, that the Scriptures are simple enough for even the “unlearned” to understand—at least for a basic understanding of how one can be saved. As it turned out, this individual inquiry would later produce thousands of different denominations espousing specific doctrine—pedobaptism vs. believer’s baptism, Arminianism vs. Calvinism, premillennialism vs. amillennialism, etc.—distinguishing themselves from others, just as the RCC had feared. Ironically, putting the Bible into the hands of all of God’s people, not just the ecclesiological elite, has also been the means to preserving the fundamental truth of the gospel of grace which the RCC had abandoned by the time of the Reformation. The Council of Trent was written in 1546 as a counter response to the teachings of the Reformation and declared,

“If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, LET HIM BE ANATHEMA” (Sixth Session, Canons Concerning Justification, Canon 12).¹¹⁴

“If anyone says that the justice received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase, LET HIM BE ANATHEMA” (Sixth Session, Canons Concerning Justification, Canon 24).¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Cf. J.I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, chap. 2, “What is ‘Fundamentalism’?”

¹¹⁴ Council of Trent, emphasis mine.

¹¹⁵ Council of Trent, emphasis mine.

Roman Catholic traditions have been passed down orally (by word of mouth), from generation to generation. They receive expression in church councils and papal decrees in which the pope may legislate *ex cathedra*, i.e. with the full authority of the office of the pope. The following are examples of some of the traditions originating from the magisterium, some of which are supported in the apocryphal additions to the OT.

1. Purgatory—an intermediate place of punishment between heaven and earth during which those destined for heaven must be purified of remaining, non-mortal sins. It is nothing less than self-atonement for one's sins.
2. Indulgences—payments to the church from friends and family for the dead to reduce their time in purgatory. The cathedral in Rome, Italy was built with such indulgences.
3. The priesthood—an ongoing human interposition between the believer and God other than the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. Catholic mass—the weekly re-sacrifice of Christ in which the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ sacrificed in the mass, called transubstantiation.
5. Worship of the virgin Mary or Mariolatry. Also praying to Mary and other saints.
6. The perpetual virginity of Mary who is said to have remained a virgin after Christ's birth.
7. The immaculate conception of Mary—In her conception in the womb, Mary was preserved from the stain of original sin.
8. The assumption of Mary—Like Enoch and Elijah, Mary's body and soul were received into heaven without undergoing death.
9. Celibacy of priests and nuns.
10. The pope as the human head of the entire church.
11. The infallibility of the pope when speaking *ex cathedra* in his office as pope.
12. Baptismal regeneration—the presumption that all baptized infants or adults are, in fact, regenerated in the act of baptism and forgiven of their sins.
13. Limbus Infantum—the doctrine that unbaptized infants dying in infancy are sent to a place where they experience neither the pain of punishment nor the joys of heaven.
14. The Confessional—whereby the sinner makes confession of his sins to a Catholic priest and receives absolution (forgiveness) from the same.

We could continue with this list, but these will suffice. A casual glance at any of these beliefs reveals that none of them may be substantiated by the Scriptures. So, how do Roman Catholics go about proving these doctrines? They rely on church tradition or additional books to the canon known as the Apocrypha, accepted into the RCC canon by the Council of Trent in 1546. (Trent was Rome's Response to the Reformation.)

Among the Apocryphal books, Judith names Nebuchadnezzar as king of the Assyrians living in Nineveh rather than king of the Babylonians in Babylon—a significant historical error. In Tobit, the angel Azarius claims to be the son of Ananias; but angels are not procreated from human beings. The book of Baruch, who was employed by Jeremiah as his amanuensis or secretary, quotes from Daniel which was not written until roughly 70 years after Jeremiah. 2 Maccabees 12 teaches the doctrine of prayers for the dead, purgatory, and indulgences—payments for the dead to reduce their time in purgatory. During the Maccabean revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes, Judas Maccabeus and his soldiers were retrieving the bodies of their fallen comrades, discovering idols

underneath them. Concluding that their deaths were the result of idolatry, Judas sent a collection of money to Jerusalem as a sacrifice for their sins. In 2 Maccabees we read,

In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin. (2 Maccabees 12: 43-45)¹¹⁶

The RCC finds ample proof of purgatory in this passage as well as proof for almsgiving as a way of meriting salvation. More explicit proof for this last doctrine is found in Tobit.

Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor, and the face of God will not be turned away from you. If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion; if few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have. So you will be laying up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity. For almsgiving delivers from death and keeps you from going into the Darkness. Indeed, almsgiving, for all who practice it, is an excellent offering in the presence of the Most High. (Tobit 4: 7-11)

Prayer with fasting is good, but better than both is almsgiving with righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than wealth with wrongdoing. It is better to give alms than to lay up gold. For almsgiving saves from death and purges away every sin. Those who give alms will enjoy a full life, but those who commit sin and do wrong are their own worst enemies. (Tobit 12: 8-10)

There is similarity between "...so you will be laying up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity" and 1 Tim. 6: 17-19.

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.¹⁸ *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,¹⁹ **storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.** (1 Tim. 6:17-19 NASB)

In this text, Paul is not teaching salvation by almsgiving, but rather the temporal realization or experience of genuine Christian life lived wholistically in obedience to Christ—**life indeed**. As Christ continually gave his life in humble service throughout His earthly sojourn, the Christian must imitate His behavior to **take hold of** Christ's genuine experience of what life on earth is supposed to be—a life filled with self-sacrifice rather than narcissistic self-pleasing. The text also teaches the certainty of rewards beyond eternal life promised by Christ.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.²⁰ "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matt. 6:19-21 NASB)

¹¹⁶ David Briones, Prof. at Westminster Theological Seminary, from desiringgod.org

The **treasures in heaven** in this text are not eternal life. A person cannot **store up more** eternal life which, by definition, is limitless; and if Jesus is speaking of eternal life, the text could be used to prove merited salvation. But one can **store up** treasures in heaven in the form of rewards (e.g. 1 Cor. 3: 8; Prov. 19: 17). Giving to others out of gratitude and love to Christ is the response of faith in what Christ promises in the Sermon on the Mount. But without faith we cannot please God (Heb. 11: 6); therefore, giving as a means of earning eternal life is not done with faith, and therefore, is sin (Rom. 14: 23; cf. 1 Cor. 13: 3).

None of this is to imply that reading the Apocrypha would not be beneficial to the discerning Christian as long as he can glean the wheat and leave the chaff. Yet, it is clear from some of the teachings of the Apocrypha that Roman Catholicism has replaced some biblical teaching with traditions. These have either been manufactured by RC popes or have been supported from the Apocrypha, e.g. the merit of alms for the saving of the soul taught in Tobit 4 and 12, a flagrant contradiction of justification by faith alone in Christ alone taught throughout the Bible (Gen. 15 and Hab. 2: 4 compared with Rom. 4 and Gal. 3.)

It should be noted that while Jesus quoted from almost every OT book, He never quotes from the Apocrypha. Although Jude 9 and 2 Tim. 3: 8 refer to two Jewish traditions, their citation does not prove that either Jude or Paul accepted the source of the information as the Word of God (possibly *The Assumption of Moses* and one other unknown source). Their citations only prove that they believed the information was true, the only reason they were inspired to include it. Contrarily, the NT writers make prolific use of OT citations to verify and support their teaching.

Jesus chastised the Pharisees about the scrupulous keeping of their **traditions** (*paradosis*) while simultaneously violating the written word of God.

The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem,² and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed.³ (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, *thus* observing the traditions of the elders;⁴ and *when they come* from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)⁵ The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition [*paradosis*] of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?"⁶ And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.'⁷ 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'⁸ "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition [*paradosis*] of men."⁹ He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition [*paradosis*]."¹⁰ "For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH';¹¹ but you say, 'If a man says to *his* father or *his* mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given *to God*),'¹² you no longer permit him to do anything for *his* father or *his* mother;¹³ *thus* invalidating the word of God by your tradition [*paradosis*] which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that." (Mk. 7:1-13 NASB)

One of these traditions concerned proper washing before meals without which a person remained **impure** (Mk. 1: 2). They also cleansed themselves after coming from the market because there they would accidentally brush up against unclean tax collectors, sinners, and Gentiles (Mk. 1: 4).

Mark also informs us—with an air of impatience—that there were **many other things which they have received in order to observe** (v. 4).¹¹⁷ Proper washing was accomplished by letting someone pour clean water into the cupped hands with the fingers extended, thus enabling the water to touch the skin between the fingers.¹¹⁸ On this occasion, some Pharisees confronted Jesus with His negligence in teaching His disciples the proper ceremony, leaving them defiled.

The tradition of the elders was serious business to the scribes and Pharisees, equal to the law itself since this oral tradition—eventually written down in the *Mishnah* in 200 AD¹¹⁹—was the official interpretation of what the law meant and how it was to be applied to daily life. The oral tradition of the elders was not considered by the scribes and Pharisees to be an addition to the Law of Moses, but “an integral part of that Law. The oral law is considered to be revelation from God”.¹²⁰ Today, Jewish scholars insist that this oral tradition—as the application of the written law—was in existence from the time the Law was given at Sinai and is as old as the Pentateuch itself (the five books of Moses). For a long time, it was never committed to writing but memorized and passed down from generation to generation. This was the content of the **ancestral traditions** (*paradosis*) which the Apostle Paul mentions as one who had studied under Gamaliel (Gal. 1: 14; cf. Acts 22: 3), either the son or grandson of Hillel.¹²¹

Ironically, the RCC makes the same claim for its extrabiblical (outside the bible) ecclesiastical traditions which, unlike the NT, cannot be traced back to the apostles through written manuscripts.

So far, not one case of extrabiblical tradition that could be traced back to the apostles has been documented. It is a claim without content or substance.¹²²

Even the Roman Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, makes this admission indirectly by saying,

We may therefore state quite confidently that for theology, scripture is in practice the only material source of faith to which it (the Church) has to turn as being the absolutely original, underived source and *norma non normata* [*norm that cannot be normed, or standard without a comparable standard, D.M.*]¹²³

These untraceable traditions were not committed to writing but have been passed down from generation to generation through the pronouncements of the RCC, much like the *Mishnah* was passed down by the oral tradition of the scribes and Pharisees. However, Roman Catholic scholars have been unable to substantiate this claim of unwritten, oral apostolic tradition. While we have over five thousand manuscripts of the NT substantiating the content and accuracy of the copies of the autographa, RC scholars instruct us to take their word for it that extrabiblical oral tradition exists, handed down from the apostles containing doctrines like the worship of Mary, Mary as the mediatrix between Christ and believers, celibacy of priests, purgatory, etc. This unwritten tradition is justified by RC scholars from such texts as 2 Thess. 2: 15.

¹¹⁷ Lane, *Mark*, p. 247.

¹¹⁸ Lane, p. 246

¹¹⁹ William Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 609.

¹²⁰ Knox Chamblin, *Matthew*, p. 107 (unpublished) emphasis his; cf. Chamblin, *Matthew*, (published) pp. 773-774.

¹²¹ Chamblin, *Matthew*, (published), p. 774.

¹²² David T. King, *Holy Scripture—The Ground and Pillar of Our Faith*, Vol. 1, p. 61.

¹²³ King, pp. 62-63.

So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us. (2 Thess. 2:15 NASB)

But it is clear that Paul was simply speaking of the authority of his teaching regardless of the manner or mode in which it was **delivered**, whether orally or in writing. Further, there is no evidence that there was any essential doctrine in Paul’s oral instruction that was not sooner or later committed to writing in his letters to the churches.¹²⁴

Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly [*katecho*] to the traditions, just as I **delivered** them to you. (1 Cor. 11:2 NASB)

Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. **And so I direct in all the churches.** (1 Cor. 7:17 NASB)

The verb, **delivered**, is aorist, indicating an accomplished action. As King insists,

The apostles did not command the early Christians to identify, develop or refine these traditions, but to keep, hold, and obey what they had already been delivered.¹²⁵

King goes on to draw a parallel between the teaching of Rome and the heresy of Gnosticism in the early centuries of the church which insisted upon the “living tradition” of the church known only to a select few believers who possessed special knowledge (*gnosis*) for the interpretation of Scripture. Commenting on the Gnostic heresy, Irenaeus (130 AD to 200 AD) says,

Such, then, is their system, which neither the prophets announced, nor the Lord taught, nor the apostles delivered, but of which they boast that beyond all others they have a perfect knowledge. They gather their views from other sources than the Scriptures...When, however, they are confuted from the Scriptures, they turn round and accuse these same Scriptures, as if they were not correct, nor of authority, and [assert] that they are ambiguous, and that the truth cannot be extracted from them by those who are ignorant of tradition. For [they allege] that the truth was not delivered by means of written documents, but *viva voce* [*living voice*].¹²⁶

Therefore, we see the close connection between the sufficiency of Scripture and the clarity of Scripture. As the Gnostics in the second century AD, the RCC claims that the average believer with his inferior knowledge cannot be trusted with interpreting the Bible for himself. He must yield to the infallible interpretation of the church vested in bishops, and finally the pope himself. Because the Bible—according to RC authorities—is unclear, it is also insufficient. The believer needs the aid of additional, infallible information mediated through priests, bishops, and the pope, to make the Scriptures clear; and it is historically accurate to say that this additional tradition has become a substitute for the Scriptures.

According to Gerhard Maier, arguments against the clarity of Scripture have come from three primary sources: Gnosticism, the liberal “higher” critical teaching of scholars who do not hold to

¹²⁴ King, Vol. 1, pp. 55-59.

¹²⁵ King, p. 113, emphasis mine.

¹²⁶ King, pp. 59-60, emphasis mine.

the plenary (complete) inspiration of Scripture, and Roman Catholicism.¹²⁷ Roman scholars insist on the need for tradition and higher critical scholars believe in the need for rational criticism of the Bible to purge it of ignorant superstitions, critical reasoning which is supposedly “higher” than the wisdom of God. Human reasoning and tradition make up for the insufficiency of Scripture. In essence, they are one and the same thing, for they are the products of human wisdom.

For since in the wisdom of God the world **through its wisdom** did not *come to know* God, God was well-pleased through **the foolishness of the message preached** to save those who believe.²² For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom;²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, (1 Cor. 1:21-23 NASB)

God would not submit the way of salvation to self-righteous Jews or intellectually arrogant Gentiles; therefore, He devised a means of salvation which depended on submission to a simple message that most men despised. Many would argue that reformed confessions have done the same thing for reformed believers—i.e. substitute their confessions and creeds (their “wisdom”) for the Bible—but as we have already seen, the WCF as well as other reformed confessions we did not examine, maintains that Scripture only is the infallible word of God which cannot be equaled or supplemented. By its own admission, the WCF does not claim the prerogatives belonging only to Scripture, something RC will not admit for their own tradition which, by their own admission, is equal to Scripture.

The Pharisaical tradition mentioned in Mark 7 originated in the Great Synagogue established during the days of Ezra with 120 Jewish elders, including prophets, who had returned with Ezra from exile. Its purpose was not to create new laws but to preserve the Mosaic Law and provide application and explanation of the Law for an era in which prophetic activity was ending and moral restraint lagging. New rules for applying the Law were added to erect a “fence” around the Law alerting the Israelite before the Law was actually broken. The Great Synagogue and the work of Ezra served to provide a base of tradition distinguished from Mosaic Law which became a turning point in Israel’s appreciation of the oral tradition.¹²⁸ Such was the viewpoint of the scribes and Pharisees concerning the **tradition (*paradosis*) of the elders**, one which was not shared by Jesus; and it was increasingly clear to the Pharisees and their legal experts, the scribes, that Jesus transgressed this tradition on several important issues: Sabbath observance, eating with unclean sinners, and fasting. His further neglect of ritual washing before meals was yet another offensive position which demonstrated His disregard for the sustained oral traditions of the elders handed down from generation to generation.¹²⁹ His contempt would not be allowed to stand unchallenged.

We are reminded of the historical controversies between John Huss (burned at the stake in 1415) and Martin Luther (harassed by Rome 100 years later) and the Roman Catholic hierarchies of their day. The contention was not over the interpretation of Scripture as such but the imposition of RC traditions (e.g. indulgences; see definition above) which contradicted Scripture. As Luther explained while standing before the Diet of Worms in 1521, popes and councils make mistakes; therefore, he was bound only by what the Scriptures said, not Rome. Regrettably, the same

¹²⁷ King, p. 60.

¹²⁸ Chamblin, *Matthew*, p. 775.

¹²⁹ Lane, p. 245, Hendriksen, p. 609.

controversy remains today—*sola Scriptura* vs. Scripture and tradition and the RC magisterium—but, happily, minus the executions.

It should be observed from both Matthew's and Mark's accounts that the subject in question has nothing to do with the Law of God given to Moses—the Scriptures—but only the tradition of the elders (Matt. 15: 2; Mk. 7: 3). Mosaic Law did not require washing before meals. Levitical priests were required to wash their hands and feet before entering the tabernacle, and this ceremonial law provided the scribes and Pharisees the justification for demanding the practice from everyone else (Ex. 30: 19).¹³⁰ There were also other ritual cleansing requirements for certain situations (Lev. 15: 5-27; 16: 26)¹³¹ but these laws had nothing to do with the normal meal. The Pharisees had made it into a moral law which any righteous person would keep. Jesus wastes no time in exposing their hypocrisy, and Matthew avails himself of every opportunity to record Jesus' contempt for them. The word **hypocrite** or **hypocrites** is used 14 times in Matthew.

Sometimes traditions are good and do not interfere with genuine obedience to the Law of God; they are identical to it. The word tradition (*paradosis*) in the NT can be another designation of sound Biblical teaching (1 Cor. 11: 2; 2 Thes. 2: 15). Only the context can determine whether the word is used negatively or positively. At other times tradition can actually replace such obedience or even prevent it. Such was the case here. The Pharisees had developed a tradition called **corban** (Mk. 7: 11) or **given to God** (Matt. 15: 5) in which a man could donate anything he possessed to God or to the Temple. This sounds very pious, but the condition of this generosity—according to one interpretation—was that the donation could be made posthumously (after death). Thus, the practical affect was that the person could enjoy his wealth during his lifetime without material sacrifice, and at his death his money would be **given to God** when he no longer needed it. Another interpretation is that by declaring his money **corban**, one was not necessarily giving the money to God but merely withdrawing it from its normal use and making it unavailable to anyone else—in this case, his parents. Either way, the practice effectively sheltered him from any obligation to care for his parents. As indicated by Mark's account (v. 12), even if a man regretted his action and wished to reverse his vow and give needed assistance, the scribes would not permit him to do so because of his oath. If a man made an oath, he was duty bound to keep it (Num. 30: 1-2). They therefore maliciously used the law of God concerning oaths to violate the law concerning honoring one's parents.¹³²

But Jesus would not allow them to twist the truth. To be sure, the Law said a man must be faithful to keep his vows, but he could not use this vow to violate or invalidate the express commandment of God to honor his parents. Reducing the argument to an absurd conclusion (*reductio ad absurdum*), this would be similar to a man making a vow to murder someone and being forced by the church to honor this vow. Murder is a violation of the law of God, and no one can make a legitimate vow to murder anyone. His vow therefore becomes null and void. There was no express commandment in the Law to declare one's possessions as corban or given to God; only the appropriate tithes and offerings were required. But there was the fifth commandment—**Honor your father and your mother**. The practice of corban was a man-made tradition having no

¹³⁰ Lane, p. 245.

¹³¹ Cited in Hendriksen, p. 608,

¹³² Lane, *Mark*, p. 252.

relationship to the Law of God and used for selfish purposes. Consequently, Jesus throws the initial accusation of **transgressing the tradition of the elders** (15: 2) back into their faces with His own accusation, **And why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?** (v. 3) Had this been the only example of such tampering, Jesus may not have been so severe; but this was but one infraction among many in which they despised the Law in favor of their man-made laws (Mk. 7: 13).

We should observe here that Jesus' understanding of honoring father and mother was not limited to being respectful to one's parents—a subjective concept not easily measured. Respect was certainly included, and He even quotes the case law of Exodus 21: 17 which calls for the execution of anyone who curses his father or mother (Mark 7: 11; cf. Lev. 20: 9; Deut. 21: 18-21). However, Jesus also includes material assistance as part of one's obligations to his parents. If they are old, sick, or otherwise financially incapacitated, an adult child—particularly an adult male child—was obligated to help them. Avoiding this obligation violated the law. Doubtless Jesus had already practiced what He was now preaching since he had taken care of His mother Mary and His younger siblings after the death of Joseph until He began His ministry at age 30. We may safely assume Joseph died shortly after Jesus' experience in the temple at age 12, for we hear no more about him (Luke 2). (But my opinion is not founded on Scripture, but supposition.) Paul confirms the continuation of this obligation (1 Timothy 5: 3-4, 8).

History was repeating itself. God's covenant people had not changed much from Isaiah's day when Israel was going through the motions of religion but their hearts were far from God. The quotation of Matthew 15: 8-9 is taken from Isaiah 29: 13.

Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned *by rote*, (Isa. 29:13 NASB)

While giving God **lip service**, they were not honoring Him with heart obedience. Their traditions had become more important than the commandments of God, and therefore, they were only pleasing themselves. When men seize for themselves the right to tamper with the original meaning and application of the law of God, they will inevitably develop a tradition made in their own image—one which eliminates the radical demands of heart obedience and pure motives. He who condemns what God allows (thus making additions to the Law of God) will soon allow what God condemns (thus making deletions to the Law of God).

Pentecostals have made additions to the moral law against drunkenness. Taking their cue from Eph. 5: 18, **And do not get drunk with wine**, they have put an additional fence around this commandment by forbidding the use of alcohol altogether, arguing that people drink alcohol only to get drunk. Therefore, if you forbid alcohol altogether, people will avoid drunkenness. It is difficult to change such "traditions" even with the careful exegesis of Scripture. Christians get something in their heads that cannot be challenged even with overwhelming biblical evidence.¹³³

Those of us who are reformed are not immune to elevating our traditions to a canon-like status. There are traditions within Presbyterianism, I believe, which cannot be adequately supported with

¹³³ See my notes on 1 Tim. 3: 3a, "not addicted to wine".

Scripture, one being the differentiation between ruling and teaching elders—the teaching elder who must be ordained by the presbytery and the ruling elder ordained by the local congregation.¹³⁴

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, **especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.** (1 Tim. 5:17 NASB)

I may be missing something here, but the text indicates that elders who **rule** (ruling elders) may also be the same people (**especially those**) who teach and preach (teaching elders). Ruling elders who work hard at preaching and teaching should be **considered worth of double honor** (pay) because of the extra time they spend studying the word of God and preparing messages which edify the congregation. The text also implies a plurality of teachers and preachers who share this responsibility, not simply one elder (the “senior pastor”) who generally does 90 percent of the preaching.

Teaching elders also become members of the Presbytery, not their own churches which often isolates them from the congregations they serve and elevates them above fellow elders who are merely “ruling” elders, creating a professional class of elders—usually seminary-trained—who are sometimes more concerned with what is happening in the denomination than in their immediate churches. This is especially true in large congregations which often resemble corporations more than churches.

Moreover, the presbytery exam necessary to become a teaching elder becomes an “event” during which the candidate’s intellect and memory are tested rather than his ability to exegete Scripture, communicate practical applications from the text, and care for the flock. (There is only time for the candidate to preach one sermon which is hardly a test of exegetical ability or practical application.) This kind of “examination” will take years, not one day, and one can pass it only through diligent labor and prayerful humility rather than mere intellect, education, and memorization of the confessions. In a sense, his usefulness in teaching, preaching, counseling, and caring is always under examination, one which may only be tested by the congregation under the guidance of the elders.

I understand that the church must start its evaluation at some point, and there are many men who wish to be “teaching elders” who do not have the requisite intellectual and communicative skills. On the other hand, all these skills must be developed over time and can best be nurtured and evaluated within the context of the caring community of the church with appointed elders who view themselves as shepherds rather than administrators (cf. Acts 20: 17-38, where elders are commanded to **shepherd the church of God**). Some churches do better than others in implementing a mentoring system under experienced teaching elders, but often young seminarians are ill-equipped to handle the complex issues and temptations facing them. They are being set up for failure—professional and moral—by a system which should submit itself to re-examination and possible overhaul.

¹³⁴ See my notes on 1 Timothy 5.

2. New Revelations of the Spirit

WCF 1.6 The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, **whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.**

After a brief look at the additions made by Roman Catholicism, we will now take a look at additions to Scripture made by those who claim the legitimacy of continuing special revelation. In the 16th century, the phrase, “new revelations of the Spirit” was directed against the Anabaptists. I hasten to add that there is, in fact, continuing general revelation. God continues to open up for us the wonders of His creation on a daily basis.¹³⁵ Scientifically, we know much more about planet earth, the universe, the human body, etc. than we ever have before now, although true science is often obscured by unsubstantiated theories (e.g. evolution; the imminent perils of climate change, etc.).

This knowledge, by God’s common grace, will continue to grow as the decades and centuries pass, assuming we do not continue the flight from reality that we have seen in sexuality, climate change, economics, et al. But stupidity can only take you so far. 2 + 2 will always equal 4; and men will always be men, and women will be women, despite any protests to the contrary. Sooner or later, a denial of God’s general revelation (stupidity) in any fundamental area will lead so far in the direction of extinction that it must be abandoned even by its religious zealots.

Most charismatics who believe in new revelations of the Spirit would not presume to place these revelations on a level equal to Scripture. I believe this position is inconsistent; for they also believe that these new revelations are given to them directly by the Holy Spirit rather than indirectly through the Spirit’s illumination of the Scriptures, which is old revelation given to every believer. Why would these new, as opposed to old, revelations be excluded from Scripture if their direct source is the Holy Spirit?

a. The test of OT prophets

True OT prophets were infallible, and they spoke words which were the very word of God, introducing their prophetic utterances with “Thus says the Lord,” a word combination occurring 417 times in the 1995 NASB. If a prophet made a prediction that did not come true, or he spoke in the name of a false god, he was, by definition, a false prophet liable to death.

'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and **I will put My words in his mouth**, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.¹⁹ 'It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him.²⁰ **But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.**²¹ ²² "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?'²¹ ²² "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, **if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not**

¹³⁵ Frame, *DWG*, p. 234.

spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. (Deut. 18:18-22 NASB)

Several important points emerge from this text.

(1) God puts His words into the prophet's mouth, a prophet whom God himself had raised up. The words, therefore, are not primarily the words of the prophet, but God's words. The prophet is God's human instrument in speaking His words to His people. This does not imply that the prophet was in a trance-like state as if in a dream; but even while formulating his own language in prophesying, the Spirit of God was operative in inspiring the prophet to speak the words God chose for him to speak. By no means should the prophet put his words in God's mouth.

(2) To speak **presumptuously** meant that the prophet did one, or both, of two things. If his predictions did not come true, then he had not spoken God's words. God determines the future, so if what the prophet predicted did not come to pass, then God had not spoken because God never makes mistakes about the future. The future is in God's hands who ordained all things that come to pass and declares **the end from the beginning**. The OT prophets were not graded on percentages, as if they were true prophets if what they predicted came true most of the time. God's word is not true most of the time. It is true all of the time.

¹¹also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose **who works all things after the counsel of His will**, (Eph. 1:11 NASB)

⁹Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me, ¹⁰ **Declaring the end from the beginning**, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; (Isa. 46:9-10 NASB)

But speaking **presumptuously** implies more than merely making false predictions; it also meant that the prophet spoke contrary to God's revealed will in His word, in Israel's case, the Law of Moses which said, "You shall have no other gods before Me."

"If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, ² **and the sign or the wonder comes true**, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, '**Let us go after other gods** (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' ³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deut. 13:1-3 NASB)

Notice in this text that the **sign or wonder comes true**, but signs and wonders may have satanic origin. This appears to be true in the case of the Egyptian magicians in Moses' day (Ex. 7: 11, 22) and the signs and wonders produced at the end of the age.

For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains *will do so* until he is taken out of the way. ⁸ Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; ⁹ *that is*, **the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders**, (2 Thess. 2:7-9 NASB)

God tested Israel to see if Israel would **love** him exclusively by keeping His commandments—the word of God already delivered through Moses—even if confronted by false prophets making accurate predictions and producing signs and wonders. Nothing, not even signs and wonders, could take the place of God’s word delivered through Moses and inscribed on tablets of stone (the context of Deut. 18 and 13). In the same way, the professing church will be tested at the end of the age, and all but the elect—identified in Revelation as **those who dwell on the earth**—will be deceived by such signs and wonders.

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon.¹² He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.¹³ **He performs great signs**, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men.¹⁴ **And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs** which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. (Rev. 13:11-14 NASB)

And the beast was seized, and with him **the false prophet who performed the signs** in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. (Rev. 19:20 NASB)

"For **false** Christs and **false** prophets will arise and **will show great signs and wonders**, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. (Matt. 24:24 NASB)

But it will not be possible to deceive the elect, for Christ intercedes for the elect even as He did Peter (Lk. 22: 31-32; cf. Jn. 10: 27-28).

(3) The false, presumptuous prophet, was put to death for speaking words which were not God’s words, effectively putting words in God’s mouth.

In Jer. 28, the false prophet, Hananiah, dies at the word of Jeremiah for falsely prophesying the return of Judah from exile in Babylon after two years. In that same narrative, Jeremiah subjects himself to the Deuteronomic test of the prophet by prophesying something which would take place in the near future—Hananiah’s death within one year—alongside his prophecy which would take place in the distant future—the return of Judah from exile in 70 years, something which would not take place within the lifetimes of many older people who were hearing this prophecy. So, how did the older people in Jeremiah’s day know that it would be 70 years rather than 2? Hananiah dies within a year, proving Jeremiah to be the true prophet.

Micaiah, a lesser-known prophet before Jeremiah, prophesies that Israel and Judah will be defeated by the Arameans (1 Kings 22). Not liking either Micaiah or his prophetic gift, Ahab has him imprisoned until he returns from the battle.

Then the king of Israel said, "Take Micaiah and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son;²⁷ and say, 'Thus says the king, "Put this man in prison and feed him sparingly with bread and water until I return safely.'""²⁸ Micaiah said, "**If you indeed return safely the LORD has not spoken by me.**" **And he said, "Listen, all you people."** (1 Ki. 22:26-28 NASB)

In other words, Micaiah, in the presence of witnesses—the two kings and all the people listening—subjects himself to the Deuteronomic test of a prophet. If King Ahab comes back safely, the people can dismiss Micaiah as a false prophet.

b. Difference between OT and NT prophets (?)

Wayne Grudem has argued that the prophetic gift given to those who were not apostles was qualitatively different from the prophetic gift given to the prophets of the OT and to the apostles themselves. Prophetic utterances by those given the **gift** of prophecy (1 Cor. 12: 10) were sometimes proven true after examination within the congregational meeting (per 1 Cor. 14), but at other times were proven false. Moreover, one's prophetic utterance, Grudem argues, could be a mixture of truth and error to be sorted out by the congregation, all of whom were involved in the examination, not simply those who had the prophetic gift. Even true prophecies did not share the same status as the OT or apostolic witness as the word of God; therefore, there was no incorporation of these utterances into what became known later as the canon of the NT. In Grudem's own words,

... we conclude that the whole congregation would listen and evaluate what was said by the prophet, forming opinions about it, and some would perhaps discuss it publicly. Each prophecy might have both true and false elements in it, and those would be sifted and evaluated for what they were....

It is interesting to compare the process with the judging of prophets found in the Old Testament. There, a false prophet was to die (Deut. 18: 20). In order to qualify as a false prophet, one needed only to claim to be speaking for God and then to speak something which God had not commanded (Deut. 18: 20; cf. Jer. 23: 16)

It is probably because the Old Testament prophet was in a position of speaking with God's absolute authority, that the penalty was so severe. The prophet was to be speaking God's words ("I will put my words in his mouth" Since such a prophet would have exercised tremendous authority, it was important to safeguard the prophetic office with stiff penalties for impostors.

There is no such picture in 1 Corinthians. Rather, as we have seen, the congregation would simply evaluate the prophecy and form opinions about it. Some of it might be very valuable and some of it not. This process is understandable only if there is a difference in the kind of speech envisioned by the Old Testament and that in 1 Corinthians.

While the Old Testament prophets claimed to be speaking God's very words, it is inconceivable that Paul or the Corinthians thought that God's words needed to be evaluated to see whether or not they were true or useful. So the prophets at Corinth must not have been thought to speak with divine authority attaching to their actual words. Their prophecies were subject to evaluation and questioning at every point.¹³⁶

Grudem continues by pointing out from 1 Cor. 14: 30 that one's prophetic utterance could be interrupted by another prophetic utterance from a second prophet, thus resulting in the permanent loss of the first prophecy to the church. This would indicate that such prophecies had no divine authority in the church.

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.³⁰ But if a revelation is made to **another** who is seated, **the first one must keep silent**. (1 Cor. 14:29-30 NASB)

¹³⁶ Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 61-62, emphasis mine.

Grudem explains,

The first thing we notice in this verse is that Paul seems to be totally unconcerned by the fact that the first prophecy might be lost forever and never be heard by the church. This attitude on Paul's part seems to fit the picture of New Testament prophecy that we saw in 1 Corinthians 14: 29. For if prophets had been thought to speak the very words of God, we would have expected Paul to show more concern for the preservation of these words and their proclamation. If God actually were speaking his words through a prophet to the church, it would be important for the church to hear those words! ...

However, if the New Testament prophets were only thought to be speaking merely human words to report something that God had brought to mind, Paul's instructions would be quite reasonable: Many Christians had things to contribute to the worship service (1 Cor. 14: 26), and there was only a limited amount of time. Therefore, as many people as possible should be allowed to contribute, in order that through the diversity of contributions everyone present would be edified in some way (1 Cor. 14: 31)

Someone might argue that the fact that New Testament prophecy is based on a "revelation" from God *necessarily implies* that the prophet was speaking with divine authority attaching to his very words.

This, in fact, does not need to be the case. Several instances of the terms "to reveal" (Greek *apokalytō*) and "revelation" (*apokalysis*) show that the *report* of a "revelation" can often be thought to have only the authority of merely human words—similar, for example, to the authority one would accord a sermon or the advice of a mature Christian. These reports should by no means be ignored, but neither should they be thought to have authority equal to Scripture itself in our lives.¹³⁷

Based upon his application of the Granville Sharp Rule, Grudem also maintains that Paul combines the office of apostle and prophet into one singular office.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,²⁰ having been built on the foundation of **the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*,²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (Eph. 2:19-22 NASB)

The Granville Sharp Rule for Greek grammar is as follows¹³⁸:

When the copulative *kai* [often translated "and" D.M.] connects nouns of the same case [viz. nouns (either substantive or adjective, or participles) of personal description, respecting office, dignity, affinity, or connection, and attributes, properties, or qualities, good or ill,] if the article or any of its cases, precedes the first of the said nouns or participles, and is not repeated before the second noun or participle, the latter always relates to the same person that is expressed or described by the first noun or participle: i.e., it denotes a further description of the first named person. . . .

¹³⁷ Grudem, pp. 62-64, emphasis mine.

¹³⁸ Cited from F. David Farnell, "Fallible New Testament Prophecy/Prophets? A Critique of Wayne Grudem's Hypothesis, *The Master's Seminary Journal*

Diagrammed, the Granville Sharp Rule looks like this: article [noun] *kai* [noun]. Filling in the blanks for this particular verse: **the [apostles] and [prophets]**.

When Paul says, **having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, the interpreter must determine whether Paul is identifying two different groups of people: the apostles **and** the prophets, or just one group described with two different nouns. If one group, the text could read, **“the apostles who are also prophets”**. Grudem’s justification for this translation is that the definite article **“the”** occurs only before **apostles** but not before **prophets**. Moreover, the word *kai* can be translated “also” in certain contexts.

The significance of this construction for Grudem’s thesis is that there was only one group of people in the NT church who had the authority of speaking God’s divine words, the apostles who also had the gift of prophecy. On the other hand, there were others with the gift of prophecy whose prophecy did not have this authority and was routinely subjected to the evaluation of the Christian congregation as to its accuracy. As we have seen from Grudem’s own words, some of the prophecy would be true and some false. But since the office of prophet did not have the same authority as the OT prophet or the apostles, the censure for mistakes would not be as severe.

In 1 Corinthians 14: 29 it seems that the prophet’s words could be challenged and questioned, and that the prophet could at times be wrong. Yet there is no indication that an occasional mistake would make him a “false” prophet.¹³⁹

Moreover, Grudem maintains that these NT prophets were established members of the church, not outsiders coming in from time to time.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, the object of examination was not the person making the prophecy but the prophecy itself, which could be true or false.

F. David Farnell, among others, has challenged Grudem’s application of the Granville Sharp Rule by saying that Grudem fails to account for the plural nouns in Eph. 2: 20. The phrase is not **the apostle and prophet** but **the apostles and prophets**. Both nouns are plural connected by *kai* (**and**). Farnell points out four grammatical requirements for Sharp’s Rule to be applied, one of which is the plurality of the nouns connected by *kai*. If these nouns are plural rather than singular, Sharp’s Rule does not apply. Therefore, Farnell disputes Grudem’s application of the rule to Eph. 2: 20, which means that it is preferable to interpret **apostles and prophets** as two separate groups of people.¹⁴¹

So, why is this important? Grudem, a reformed Baptist, argues for the continuation of the gift of prophecy in the NT church, but he does not argue for the continuing canon of Scripture. If, indeed, the continuing gift of prophecy has the same authority as NT apostles, there is no way to avoid the argument for a continuing canon which must incorporate the prophetic utterances going on in the church today. But if the NT prophetic gift is qualitatively different from the apostolic gift, and if

¹³⁹ Grudem, p. 69, emphasis mine.

¹⁴⁰ Grudem, p. 58.

¹⁴¹ Farnell, pp. 166-167. Farnell also cites Daniel B. Wallace who also says that plural nouns are excepted from Sharp’s Rule, p. 168; as R. Fowler White also does in “Gaffin vs. Grudem on Ephesians 2: 20” in *Cessationism Writings* (monergism.com), published in the *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 (Fall, 1992), pp. 321-330.

the prophecies involved are, to use Grudem's terminology, "merely human words"¹⁴², then there would be no argument against their non-canonical status.

Grudem makes the point that we have no written documents in the NT authored by NT prophets.

To my knowledge, nowhere in the New Testament is there a record of a prophet who is not an apostle but who spoke with absolute divine authority attaching to his very words. And we have no books of the New Testament written by anyone who claims to be a "prophet" but not an apostle as well. Moreover, in the first 150 years of the church, there is (to my knowledge) no record of any divinely authoritative word spoken by these prophets. We have no collections of "words of the prophets at Corinth," or "words of the prophets at Thessalonica," or "words of the prophets at Ephesus," or at Caesarea, etc. Yet if all these prophets were speaking the very words of God, is it not reasonable to suppose that many of these words would have been recorded and preserved for us as Scripture? If such words were indeed equal to Scripture in authority, then why were they not preserved by the early Christians? And why is there no indication that any churches tried to preserve them?

...We are put in a position of advocating the existence of a highly significant group which has left no record, no trace of itself in the pages of the New Testament or the writings of the first few generations of Christians.¹⁴³

Grudem's point is well-taken. I believe the answer to this particular defense of his position is found in the science of canonicity. Why were some writings included in the NT but not others? Could it not be that the prophetic utterances of the NT prophets, though *theopneustos* (God-breathed), were nevertheless not solely original with them but were revelations also received by the original apostles and Paul? That is to say, the NT prophets had nothing to add to the spirit-inspired understanding already possessed by the apostles. If so, then why were these revelations necessary?

For many decades, even into the second century, all the writings of the apostles were not in full possession of the ancient church which made use of what they had, namely, copies of the OT which also were in short supply. (There was no printing press until the end of the 15th century AD.) However, the OT Scriptures needed to be supplemented by new prophetic utterances elaborating more fully upon the person and work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the application of these doctrines for Christian practice, et al. The fact that we do not have these utterances in writing is ample testimony to the sufficiency of what the NT authors included in their writings.

Moreover, it was God's good pleasure for only two of the original twelve apostles (Peter and John) to commit their divinely inspired teaching to writing, although the other nine fulfilled their positive purpose in the history of redemption, and Judas his negative purpose. We also do not have all the prophetic utterances of the OT prophets. Although many of these are contained in OT narratives (e.g. Elijah and Elisha in 1 and 2 Kings), there were many prophets who were important in the life of Israel whose prophecies have not been recorded (1 Kings 18: 3-4; 1 Sam. 10: 5). Nevertheless, they served their purpose for a specific time, even being put to death by apostate Israel and Judah because of their commitment to the word of Yahweh (Matt. 23: 37; Heb. 11: 32-40). The long and short of this explanation is that although the prophetic work of non-writing prophets was needed

¹⁴² Grudem, p. 69.

¹⁴³ Grudem, pp. 339-340.

at the time, the NT and OT writings which the church eventually recognized as the word of God were a sufficient record and guide of all the church needed for faith and practice.

If Eph. 2: 20 is speaking of two groups within the NT church, not just one, then these two groups, **apostles and prophets**, constitute the **foundation** upon which the church is built. Everyone else added to the church must content himself or herself with being a simple stone built upon this foundation. In keeping with the analogy of a **foundation**, we must say that their revelational work for the church was unique and unrepeatable. It was done once, and it will not be done again and again. No one building a house builds another foundation upon the first one, and then again, laying one foundation upon another and then another. The idea of continuing foundational work is absurd on the surface of things and does violence to the analogy that Paul presents. Speaking specifically to the eleven apostles—Judas had already departed—Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would bring to mind **all** that He had said to them.

"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** that I said to you. (Jn. 14:26 NASB)

As stated earlier, although every believer enjoys the illumination of the Spirit to help him remember, understand, and apply Scripture already in existence, this particular promise was specific to the disciples. They, along with Paul and others, would provide the church God-breathed foundational teaching and tradition which became the NT. Only the apostles who had accompanied Jesus for three years could claim that the Holy Spirit was bringing to their **remembrance all that [Jesus] said to [them]**, for one cannot remember what he has never heard. None but the disciples were privileged to hear Jesus' instruction to the same extent as the disciples. The disciples later shared their Spirit-aided memories with people like Mark, Luke, James and Jude (the two biological half-brothers of Jesus; Matt. 13: 55; Mk. 6: 3). We don't know who wrote Hebrews, but all were inspired by the Spirit to produce their writings.

Paul makes it clear to the quarreling Corinthians that as Christ's apostle (1 Cor. 1: 1), he laid a **foundation** [*themelios*; the same word used in Eph. 2: 20] **...which is Jesus Christ** upon which no man could lay any other.

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a **foundation** [*themelios*], and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.¹¹ For **no man** can lay a foundation **other than the one which is laid**, which is **Jesus Christ**. (1 Cor. 3:10-11 NASB)

That is, Paul laid the foundational doctrines of the gospel based upon the person and work of Jesus Christ revealed to him not by man nor by the original apostles, but by direct revelation from Jesus Christ (Gal. 1: 1, 12). Moreover, Paul, like John the apostle in Revelation, invokes a curse upon anyone—even an angel or himself—who brings a gospel to the Galatians (and by implication, to any other church) contrary to the one he had already brought them.

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, **should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!**⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, **if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!** (Gal. 1:8-9 NASB)

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, **God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book;**¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, **God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city,** which are written in this book. (Rev. 22:18-19 NASB)

The foundational traditions and doctrines of the church could not be altered by additions or deletions. Other NT books were added, including John’s Revelation, to elaborate further upon the meaning and application of Jesus’ teaching, but nothing essentially new was added that was not already embedded in the apostolic tradition delivered to the apostles personally or through direct revelation by Christ.

Other exegetical objections to Grudem’s thesis.

Of course, Grudem would not take issue with valid arguments denying the continuing canon of Scripture, but there are other exegetical objections to Grudem’s thesis apart from his apparent misapplication of the Granville Sharp Rule. The following objections cited by Richard Gaffin are summarized by R. Fowler White.¹⁴⁴

1. Ephesians 4: 11 clearly distinguishes the gift of apostle from that of prophet. It is another text in which Sharp’s Rule cannot be applied to plural nouns connected by *kai* (and), thus identifying them as two expressions for the same group of people—per Grudem’s interpretation: “apostles who are prophets”.

And He gave some *as* **apostles**, and some *as* **prophets**, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers,¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; (Eph. 4:11-12 NASB)

The grammar here is beyond dispute, which includes two little Greek words, *men* and *de* which allow the verse to be translated, **And He gave, on the one hand, apostles, on the other hand, apostles, on the other hand, evangelists, on the other hand, pastors and teachers.**¹⁴⁵ Grudem agrees that Eph. 4: 11 differentiates between apostles and prophets, but insists that the prophets of Eph. 4: 11 are distinguished from those in Eph. 2:20 because the latter text speaks of the foundational status of the apostle-prophet while Eph. 4: 11 refers to prophets in specific “local congregations”.¹⁴⁶

However, this appears to be a case of special pleading in which Grudem assumes a difference between the context of Eph. 2: 20 and 4: 11 without sufficient proof. In both texts, Paul is speaking of the “big picture” of Christ and His universal church and the gifts given to it for the building up of the whole body.

2. Apostles and prophets are clearly distinguished from one another in 1 Cor. 12: 28. The translation, “apostles who are also prophets” would not in any sense be an acceptable translation here.

¹⁴⁴ R. Fowler White, “Gaffin vs. Grudem on Ephesians 2: 20”. I have paraphrased Fowler.

¹⁴⁵ So also Grudem, p. 342, and Farnell, p. 169.

¹⁴⁶ Grudem, p. 342.

And God has appointed in the church, **first** apostles, **second** prophets, **third** teachers, **then** miracles, **then** gifts of healings, helps, administrations, *various* kinds of tongues. (1 Cor. 12:28 NASB)

3. Nowhere in his writings does Paul call the apostles “prophets”, either individually or collectively.

4. Absent this reference to apostles as prophets anywhere else in his writings, any such reference would have been confusing to his readers in Ephesus.

White’s most important contribution to the discussion, I believe, is his description of the process by which NT prophets were examined in 1 Cor. 14. Grudem argues that each prophecy was examined to determine which particular elements of a prophecy were true and which were false. A more natural reading of the text indicates that multiple prophets were speaking multiple prophecies and that the prophets and prophecies themselves, not the individual elements of each prophecy, were under scrutiny.

Let **two or three** prophets speak, and let the **others** pass judgment. (1 Cor. 14:29 NASB)

²⁰do not **despise** prophetic utterances [*propheteia*]. ²¹But examine everything *carefully*; hold fast to that which is good; (1 Thess. 5:20-21 NASB)

The scene is that of more than one prophet prophesying in the local assembly. **Prophetic utterances** [*propheteia*] is plural. Early congregations were alerted to the constant danger of false teaching propagated by prophets who did not have Spirit-inspired authority.¹⁴⁷

¹Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because **many false prophets have gone out into the world**. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; ³and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. ⁴You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. ⁵They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 Jn. 4:1-6 NASB)

"Beware of the **false prophets**, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶"You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they? ¹⁷"**So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.** ¹⁸"A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. ¹⁹"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰"So then, you will know them by their fruits. (Matt. 7:15-20 NASB)

Like OT Israel, the early church knew that there were many prophets who had **gone out into the world** but that God had not **sent them**.

¹⁴⁷ The cited verses are cited by White.

"So do not listen to the words of the prophets who speak to you, saying, 'You will not serve the king of Babylon,' for they prophesy a lie to you; ¹⁵ **for I have not sent them,**" declares the LORD, "but they prophesy falsely in My name, in order that I may drive you out and that you may perish, you and the prophets who prophesy to you." (Jer. 27:14-15 NASB)

Therefore, recalling our earlier discussion of the inscriptional curse and the test of a true prophet in Deuteronomy, what we find in 1 Cor., 1 Thess., and elsewhere in the NT is a comparable examination of NT prophets and their prophecies. The scenario is not that the church was listening only to well-known and trusted local prophets (Grudem), but that they also must not **despise** (1 Thess. 5: 20) the responsibility of listening to other prophecies and prophets which might turn out to be utterly false. Given the change in historical context between the OT theocracy and the NT church living as **aliens** (1 Pet. 2: 11) in a hostile world, the OT penalties associated with false prophecy did not apply, but certainly they would be shown the back door to any church assembly they attempted to deceive.

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into *your* house, and do not give him a greeting; (2 Jn. 1:10 NASB)

Therefore, White argues that the NT prophets were examined in regard to

(1) their conduct; e.g., Jer. 23: 10-15; Matt. 7: 15-23; (2) the content of their prophecies; (e.g., Deut. 13: 1-5; Matt. 24: 23-27); and (3) the means of revelation (e.g., Num. 12: 6-8; 1 Cor. 13: 2, 9, 12; 15: 51).¹⁴⁸

Conduct is not explicitly mentioned in Deuteronomy, but its necessity is clear from Jeremiah 23 which mentions **Baal** worship and its implied immoralities as well as known cases of **adultery** among the false prophets. Jesus does not bother to deny the prophecies of those who will be damned, but simply says that such prophets **practice lawlessness** and build their houses **on the sand** (7: 26-27).

"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' ²³ "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' (Matt. 7:22-23 NASB)

I would offer an additional note that it is quite unlikely that the prophecies would be examined by the whole church equally. As anyone in a local church knows and as Paul explicitly said, **All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they?...All do not interpret, do they?** In the same way, everyone in the church does not have the ability to discern the difference, sometimes subtle, between truth and error. The **others** in 1 Cor. 14: 29 are either other prophets, elders, or teachers in the church with the requisite gifts to examine the content of such prophecies. This is why God gave the church elders to protect the flock from wolves in sheep's clothing.

"**Be on guard** for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ "I know that after my departure **savage wolves** will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and **from among your own**

¹⁴⁸ White, "Gaffin vs. Grudem on Ephesians 2: 20".

selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Acts 20:28-30 NASB)

I will continue to take issue with Grudem in my discussion of tongues, below; but for clarification, Wayne Grudem is NOT a wolf. He is a very faithful, reformed theologian who, I believe and others believe, is mistaken about the continuation of non-authoritative prophecy in the church today. He deserves to be heard, and his book, *The Gift of Prophecy*, even after 36 years, should encourage more dialogue between opposing sides to the twin gifts of tongues and prophecy. Many of my former African students have received free copies of Grudem's very fine work on systematic theology which they should read from front to cover. But no one can be right about everything he says.

c. New Testament tongues

As 1 Cor. 14 shows, the gift of tongues is closely related to the gift of prophecy. O. Palmer Robertson lists four elements of Biblical tongues in the NT.¹⁴⁹

1. NT tongues were revelational.
2. NT tongues were foreign languages
3. NT tongues were for public consumption [i.e. for congregational edification]
4. NT tongues were a sign indicating a radical change in the direction of redemptive history

(1) "NT tongues were revelational."

Key to determining the revelational aspect of tongues in the NT is the word **mystery** (*musterion*) and its close association with the word **revealed** [*apokalupto*] or **revelation** [*apokalupsis*].

²For one who speaks in a **tongue** [*glossa*] does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in *his* spirit he speaks **mysteries** [*musterion*]. (1 Cor. 14:2 NASB)

²⁵For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this **mystery** [*musterion*][—]so that you will not be wise in your own estimation[—]that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; (Rom. 11:25 NASB)

²⁵Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the **revelation** [*apokalupsis*] of the **mystery** [*musterion*] which has been **kept secret** for long ages past, (Rom. 16:25 NASB)

⁷but we speak God's wisdom in a **mystery** [*musterion*], the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory;⁸ *the wisdom* which **none of the rulers of this age has understood**; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;⁹ but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."¹⁰ **For to us God revealed**

¹⁴⁹ See O. Palmer Robertson, "Tongues Today?" in *Cessationism Writings*. (monergism.com for free resources online). I am much indebted to O. Palmer Robertson for this section.

[*apokalupto*] **them through the Spirit**; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. (1 Cor. 2:7-10 NASB)

²if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; ³that by **revelation** [*apokalupsis*] there was made known to me the **mystery** [*musterion*], as I wrote before in brief. ⁴By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery [*musterion*] of Christ, ⁵**which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed** [*apokalupto*] **to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit**; ⁶*to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, (Eph. 3:2-6 NASB)

Of *this church* I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the *preaching of the word of God*, ²⁶ *that is*, the **mystery** [*musterion*] which has been **hidden from the past ages and generations**, but has **now been manifested** [*phaneroō*] **to His saints**, ²⁷ to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery [*musterion*] **among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you**, the hope of glory. (Col. 1:25-27 NASB)

We could continue with citations, but you get the point. A **mystery** is something about God's redemptive purposes which is formerly hidden, but which had been **revealed**, a **revelation**. The only exception to this definition of **mystery** that I can think of is the **mystery of lawlessness** in 2 Thessalonians 2, a mystery which has not been clearly revealed to God's people even to this day, that is, unless you are convinced **the man of lawlessness** was Caesar Nero or some other Roman emperor, in which case the mystery is no longer a mystery. (But I am not a preterist.)

The **mystery** of the Gentiles being fellow-heirs of the kingdom of God along with the Jews was hidden—**kept secret for long ages past** (Rom. 16: 25) and **was not made known to the sons of men** (Eph. 3: 5), a reference to the OT prophets, but **now...revealed** to two groups of people, **the apostles and [NT] prophets** (Eph. 3: 5-6). Moreover, the Gentile inclusion into the kingdom of God on equal footing with the Jews was not completely understood or accepted by the Jewish church for many years past its consummation (see Acts 10—11, 15; Galatians).

Those with the gift of **tongues** spoke **mysteries** (1 Cor. 14: 2) whose meaning had to be interpreted with divine insight—the gift of **interpretation** (1 Cor. 12: 10). These mysteries were revelational in the sense that they were **revealed** by the Holy Spirit to His church at a time when neither the apostolic writings nor the NT canon were complete. The association between **mystery**, the **revelation** of the Gentiles (Eph. 3: 3), and **prophets** seems to call into question Grudem's belief that that the NT prophets were not, along with the apostles (and especially Paul) foundational to the mission which included the welcoming of Gentiles into Jewish fellowship. For it is clear that Paul spends the first three chapters of Ephesians explaining this mystery of Gentile inclusion; and within this context, the NT prophets are mentioned right alongside the apostles as those to whom this foundational mystery had been revealed.

An example of this is the prophecy of Agabus in Acts 11 in which he predicts a famine in Judea leading to the material relief provided by Gentile churches and distributed by Barnabas and Paul, the apostle to Gentiles, to Jewish believers in Jerusalem, thus helping to cement the bond between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

This brings up the question of the relation of **tongues** to **prophecy** and to **the mystery**. We can see that both **prophets** and **tongues** are used in conjunction with **mystery**. **Prophecy** in the NT church must have included instruction concerning Gentile inclusion into the church. This was by no means the prophets' only message, but it is likely that given this foundational mission of uniting both Jews and Gentiles into the same fellowship, prophecy facilitating this unification might possibly have been very high on the Holy Spirit's agenda for NT prophets. Likewise, I would speculate that the gift of **tongues** was also used in this grand mission of growing a **dwelling of God in the Spirit** (Eph. 2; 22) consisting of both Jewish and Gentiles stones. As we will see, tongues interpreted are the same as prophecy.

Like prophecy, **tongues** were the disclosure of divine truth not formerly revealed; otherwise, they would not have been called **mysteries** (1 Cor. 14: 2). As 14:5 indicates, if tongues are interpreted, they become prophecy.

Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but *even* more that you would prophesy; and **greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets**, so that the church may receive edifying. (1 Cor. 14:5 NASB)

Unless he interprets qualifies the phrase **greater is one who prophesies**. One who prophesies is greater only if the one speaking in tongues or some other person with the gift of interpretation does not interpret the tongues for the edification of the whole church. If he is interpreted, then his gift of tongues is understood and has become prophesy. In verse 2, **For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God** does not mean that tongues are some form of heavenly language that only God can understand. The reason the tongues-speaker is speaking only to God is that the tongues (*glossa*; language) has not yet been translated into the common language of the congregation. But when that happens, he is not only speaking to God, but to the congregation for their edification.

(2) "NT tongues were foreign languages."

What kind of language was spoken in tongues? To answer this question, we must explore the use of *glossa* elsewhere in Scripture. When we do this, we will find that the first use of the term *glossa*, besides the disputed ending of Mark 16: 9-20, is found in Acts 2.

And there appeared to them **tongues [glossa]** as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other **tongues [glossa]**, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.⁵ Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, **devout men from every nation under heaven**.⁶ And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language [*dialektos; dialect*].⁷ They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?"⁸ "And how is it that we each hear *them* in **our own language [dialektos; dialect] to which we were born**?"⁹ "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our **own tongues [dialektos; dialect]** speaking of the mighty deeds of God." (Acts 2:3-11 NASB)

From the text, it is clear that the different native languages (**to which we were born**) of these **devout men [Jews] from every nation under heaven** were being spoken by the eleven apostles, to whom Matthias had just been added (1: 26—2: 1-4). It was, of course, shocking to the foreign audience to hear men who could not have been familiar with each of these different languages—one, two, or three languages, perhaps, but not all. **The mighty deeds of God** (v. 11) were, of course, the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Christ followed later by Peter's powerful message of the gospel.

The next time we encounter the word *glossa* is in Acts 10 at the house of Cornelius, the Gentile centurion. While he was still preaching the gospel to Cornelius and his household, Peter witnesses the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon these Gentiles.

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.⁴⁵ All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.⁴⁶ **For they were hearing them speaking with tongues [glossa] and exalting God.** Then Peter answered,⁴⁷ "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" (Acts 10:44-47 NASB)

Confronted by the apostles and other circumcised believers in Jerusalem for entering a Gentile house and sharing a meal with the unclean, Peter recounts the story of what happened, concluding,

"And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them **just as He did upon us at the beginning.**¹⁶ "And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'¹⁷ **Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also** after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" (Acts 11:15-17 NASB)

The two parallel phrases, **who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did** and **God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us** (literally, "as to us") indicate that the **tongues** involved in Acts 10 were the same manifestation of tongues in Acts 2. If the household of Cornelius had spoken untranslatable gibberish, Peter would have recognized the difference between this and the spoken languages on the Day of Pentecost and would not have sensed the analogy between the two occurrences.

Moving along to Acts 19, we find the Spirit being poured out upon the disciples of John who had not yet received the Holy Spirit.

And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they *began* speaking with **tongues [glossa] and prophesying.** (Acts 19:6 NASB)

Again, the same word, *glossa*, is used; and we have no warrant to believe that these **tongues** were anything different from those in Acts 2 or 10. Although there is no explicit mention here of the Holy Spirit falling on the Ephesians **just as He did upon** the apostles at Pentecost or that this was **the same gift as He gave to** the apostles, there is the explicit mention of **tongues** along with **prophesying**, an allusion (subtle reference) to the fulfillment of Joel's prophesy Peter is quick to point out in the sermon of Acts 2.

"For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is *only* the third hour of the day; ¹⁶ **but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:** ¹⁷ 'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says, 'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; **AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY,** AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; ¹⁸ EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT **And they shall prophesy.** (Acts 2:15-18 NASB)

Here we see the inextricable connection between speaking in foreign **tongues** and **prophecy**. Peter interprets what happens on the day of Pentecost as the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (2: 28-32), and the same pattern persists in Acts 19 at Ephesus. There is no mention of tongues in Joel, but we have the inspired interpretation of Peter instructing us that Pentecost was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy which included the preaching of the gospel in foreign languages. For us to interpret the tongues in Ephesus as anything different from those in Acts 2 or 10, we would need an explicit explanation from Luke concerning their difference, especially with the allusion to Joel's prophecy and Peter's sermon.

It is also interesting to note that tongues are mentioned in only one NT epistle, 1 Corinthians; but we have no historical mention in Acts of their occurrence in Corinth. Paul visits Corinth in Acts 18, stays a year and a half, and then visits Ephesus afterwards in Acts 19. It would be quite perplexing for the gift of tongues in Corinth (Acts 18), occurring between Pentecost, Cornelius and Ephesus, to have somehow mutated into something quite different from the foreign languages in the other three instances. Apart from an explicit explanation, we do well to assume that tongues had the same manifestation in all four places—Jerusalem, Caesarea, Corinth, and Ephesus, in that order.

(3) "NT tongues were for public consumption" [i.e. for congregational edification]

This brings us back to 1 Cor. 14 and what appears to be a difference between the *glossa* in Corinth and that elsewhere in Acts

One who speaks in a tongue **edifies himself**; but one who prophesies **edifies the church**. (1 Cor. 14:4 NASB)

It has been argued that the tongues-speaker is personally edified through his gift of speaking in tongues regardless of his ability to understand what he is saying.¹⁵⁰ This implies that there is blessing involved in tongues other than revelational content. Perhaps it is a heavenly prayer language lifting the gifted up to a higher spiritual realization of the love and glory of God, of his relationship to Christ, et al.

But we may ask how this spiritual intensification takes place if not through a perceptual and rational understanding of one's manifestation of tongues. Robertson asks whether it occurs through the physiological sensations of speaking words which are unintelligible both to the speaker and the hearer; or is the speaker edified through an emotional experience which cannot be transmitted to his audience? It is obvious from the text that uninterpreted tongues, while benefitting the

¹⁵⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, p. 669.

speaker, do not benefit the hearers. Paul insists that tongues must be **interpreted** in order for the audience to be edified (vv. 5-6).

Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but *even* more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.⁶ But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching? (1 Cor. 14:5-6 NASB)

There is no **profit** (i.e. benefit) to the congregation unless the speech is intelligible, which is why Paul prefers prophecy to tongues, that is, **unless he [the tongues-speaker] interprets**, in which case tongues become prophecy. However, Robertson poses the question (in the context of modern tongues-speaking where interpretation is generally lacking) why is it that the tongues-speaker can be edified merely through the vibration of his vocal cords or through the emotional experience of hearing himself speaking in tongues, when his audience cannot be edified in the same manner? In other words, it would seem to work in both directions. Just through hearing and feeling his own intelligible speech, the tongues-speaker is benefitted spiritually and emotionally, as Paul says in v. 17a, **For you are giving thanks well enough**. The tongues-speaker, without knowing what he is saying—it is believed by some—is giving thanks. But why is his uninformed audience not able to give thanks along with him? Why can't they enter somehow into his ecstatic spiritual experience without a rational understanding of what is being said? Some would argue that they can, but Paul says they can't without understanding what is being said: **but the other person is not edified** (v. 17b). Robertson explains.

Exactly what was it in the verbal gift of prophecy that “edified”? Was it the sensations created by the voice of the prophet that edified? Was it the physical vibrations set up in the ears of the hearers that edified? Or was it the emotion experienced by the prophet himself that somehow had the effect of edifying his hearers?

No...It was the understanding of God's truth brought about by revelation through prophecy that edified.

In a similar manner, tongues that were interpreted so that people could understand the revelation became equivalent to prophecy as an instrument of edification. Without interpretation, the observing of someone speaking in a tongue had no edifying effect on the spectator.

But a further question must be asked. How is it that tongues had the effect of edifying the *speaker*...what in the act of speaking in a tongue caused it to edify? Was it the physical vibration associated with the phenomenon of tongues-speaking that edified the speaker?

Was it the emotion accompanying the experience? Tongues, like prophecy, are a verbal gift; and verbal gifts edify by communicating understanding. Edification through the exercise of a verbal gift does not occur by the physical vibration of the oral chambers. It does not occur through the non-rational stirrings of the emotions. Edification through a verbal gift occurs instead by the speaker's coming to understand and believe the truth he speaks. Otherwise there is no edification.

Robertson goes on to say that preachers or teachers are not edified unless they understand and believe what they say. There is no inherent benefit to preaching or teaching unless the mind and heart are engaged in what is being said. The preacher must first preach his own sermon to himself and believe it before he preaches it to others. But if, hypothetically, the preacher is benefitted in the very act of preaching without spiritually understanding his own message, then the congregation should be able to benefit from the sermon in the very act of hearing it without comprehending it.

But, of course, no one believes this; and if we don't believe this can happen, by what scriptural logic do we believe that either the tongues-speaker or the congregation can benefit from hearing something they don't understand? Paul explicitly denies that the hearers can be edified by what they don't understand (v. 17b).

But this leads us to an examination of v. 14, **For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.** As I mentioned earlier, Gordon Fee maintains that the speaker is edified without understanding his own speech.

Paul is not arguing that the tongues-speaker should also interpret for the benefit of his or her own understanding.... It would also tend to contradict what is said in vv. 2 and 4 and intimated in v. 15, that the one who speaks in tongues is edified by his or her communion with God through the Spirit, without the need of perceptual understanding. Paul's point is a simple one, and one that they themselves should fully recognize: When I pray in tongues I pray in the Spirit, but it does not benefit my mind—the implication being, as he will go on to argue in vv. 16-17, that neither does it benefit the minds of others.

But is this really what Paul is saying in vv. 2, 4, and 15? In v. 2, Paul merely says that **one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God** and in v. 4 he says that **One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself.** But Paul does not say how the speaker is edified. Fee begs the question by asserting that the speaker is edified apart from a personal understanding of what he says, but that is not found in the text. The strongest text for his interpretation is found in v. 14 where Paul says that **my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.** But what does that mean? Does it necessarily mean that Paul's mind is put "out of gear" while praying? Another question is: How can the speaker **give thanks** (v. 17a) without understanding what he is giving thanks for? Thanksgiving in the Bible always includes our rational faculties whereby we thank God for all the things he has done for us or given us. It is an act not only of the spirit but the mind also. So how is it that Paul says that while not understanding what he is saying the tongues-speaker is **giving thanks well enough**? It must be because the speaker does, in fact, understand what he is saying. Scripture does not recognize the false dichotomy between mind and spirit. This is shown by the way the words are used in the NT.

But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts,⁷ "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?"⁸ Immediately Jesus, **aware [epiginóskō] in His spirit** that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, "Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? (Mk. 2:6-8 NASB)

Jesus was cognitively and rationally **aware [epiginóskō] in His spirit** that the scribes were questioning His ability to forgive sins. He understood what they were thinking. Other uses of the word in the NT:

⁴so that you may **know [epiginóskō]** the exact truth about the things you have been taught. (Lk. 1:4 NASB)

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I **know [ginóskō]** in part, but then I will **know fully [epiginóskō]** just as I also have been **fully known [epiginóskō]**. (1 Cor. 13:12 NASB)

As the last verse indicates, *epiginóskō* can be used as a more intense kind of knowledge than *ginóskō*. Its usage in Mk. 2: 8 is quite irreconcilable with the notion that Jesus had only a vague feeling in His spirit absent of any rational certainty that the scribes were doubting His ability to forgive sins. He knew exactly what they were thinking. This should be obvious from the context alone. In the same way, Luke wanted his readers to rationally understand the **exact truth** concerning the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Spirit (*pneuma*) and **mind** (*nous*) are found together in other texts besides 1 Cor. 14.

²²that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,²³ and that you be renewed [*ananeóō*] in the **spirit of your mind**, (Eph. 4:22-23 NASB)

Commenting on this verse, Charles Hodge says,

The “spirit of the world,” 1 Cor. 2: 12, is the controlling, animating principle of the world, that which makes it what it is. The spirit of the mind therefore is its interior life; that of which the *nous* [*mind*], *kardia* [*heart*], *psuche* [*soul*] are modes of manifestation. That, therefore, which needs to be renewed, is not merely outward habits or modes of life; not merely transient tempers or dispositions, but the interior principle of life which lies back of all that is outward, phenomenal, or transient.¹⁵¹

In other words, the whole man—mind, heart, and soul—must be renewed. With the same meaning in mind, Paul says in Romans 12: 1,

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual [*logikos*] service of worship.² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the **renewing** [*anakainosis*] of your **mind** [*nous*], so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:1-2 NASB)

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your **reasonable** service. (Rom. 12:1 KJV)

The KJV and NKJ both use **reasonable** instead of **spiritual**. I cannot understand why all the major versions translate *logikos* as **spiritual**, normally translated as *pneumatikos*; but at least these two translations use **reasonable**. The word is not *pneumatikos*, but *logikos*, from which we get the word, “logic”, defined as the product of rational thinking. I have already warned that human reasoning has its limits. It must not be exalted above the word of God (1 Cor. 1), as if the Scriptures can be subjected to the final test of our logic. However, I did not say that logic is unnecessary. We cannot understand the Bible, even simple language, without the use of logic. But this does not suggest cold, hard-hearted calculation, unless of course we can accuse Jesus of encouraging this disposition.

And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, **AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND** [*dianoia*]." (Matt. 22:37 NASB)

¹⁵¹ Charles Hodge, *Ephesians*, p. 264, emphasis mine.

The word for **mind** (*dianoia*) in Matt. 22: 37 is not the same as in Eph. 4: 23, but the idea is identical. We must love God with our whole being, including our minds; and our **spiritual service** (Rom. 12: 1) cannot exclude **reasonable** or rational service. Therefore, I think it is mistaken to believe that Paul in 1 Cor. 14: 14 suggests a potential extraction or separation of the mind from the spirit while the tongues-speaker is exercising his gift. The Scriptures do not present such a separation as possible.

But if the sentence, **my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful** does not mean that the tongues-speaker doesn't know what he is saying, then what does it mean? I believe Robertson has the answer.

As a consequence of this understanding as he prays, he is edified. But at the same time, his "mind", that instrument by which he would formulate his thoughts for the purpose of communicating them to others, remains "unfruitful". It bears no fruit. No one else in the assembly is edified with him, because no one else understands what he has spoken in the tongue. He is edified well enough. But no others are edified because his thoughts are not being communicated to them in a way that they can understand.¹⁵²

Said another way, although the speaker is praying "fruitfully" and is being edified by the truth content of his tongues, his **mind** is not being fruitful for the sake of others. That is, his mind is not formulating words and phrases by which the word of God communicated through tongues could be effectively communicated to the listener for his edification.¹⁵³ If, on the other hand, he would interpret the tongues, the congregation would receive valuable prophecy by which they could be edified in their faith. Verses 16-17 support this conclusion.

Otherwise if you bless in the spirit *only*, how will the one who fills the place of the **ungifted** say the "Amen " at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying?¹⁷ For you are giving thanks well enough, but the **other person** is not edified. (1 Cor. 14:16-17 NASB)

In other words, the **other person**, the **ungifted**, receives no "fruit" from the manifestation of tongues which could be **interpreted** either by the tongues-speaker or someone else in the congregation. Verse 28 proves that the gift of tongues was not necessarily accompanied by the gift of interpretation: **but if there is no interpreter, he [the tongues-speaker] must keep silent in the church, and let him speak to himself and to God**. This statement repeats the principle taught in 14: 2: If the speaker's tongue is not interpreted, he is speaking only to God because no one else understands. The verse does not prove that the purpose of tongues is to provide a private prayer language for the spiritual elite in the church. Paul's command of v. 28 to **keep silent and speak to himself and to God** should not be interpreted as the ideal manifestation of tongues as a private prayer language. "NT tongues were for corporate consumption", but the lack of an interpreter demands that he keep his gift to himself until this can be remedied by a gifted interpreter. Paul has already covered the corporate utility of every spiritual gift in chapter 12, and he need not repeat himself here.

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good**. (1 Cor. 12:7 NASB)

¹⁵² Robertson, *Cessationism Writings*, monergism.com, emphasis mine.

¹⁵³ Also the opinion of Charles Hodge, *1 Corinthians*, p. 288.

Not simply for the good of the tongues-speaker.

(4) “NT tongues were a sign indicating a radical change in the direction of redemptive history.”

In the Law it is written, "BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME," says the Lord. (1 Cor. 14:21 NASB)

Paul's reference to Isaiah in v. 21 puts the issue of tongues-speaking in Corinth into the broader context of the redemptive history of Israel. For hundreds of years, God had appealed to his stubborn and disobedient people, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, through his servants the prophets. The OT prophets were continually calling the people to repentance for worshipping false gods and for the immoral behavior which inevitably springs from idolatry. During this time, the prophetic word was in Hebrew, the language all Israelites could understand.

However, because His people despised the prophetic word delivered in their own language, He would send the Assyrian armies to defeat Israel and the Babylonian armies to defeat Judah, but they would not be speaking in Hebrew, but in foreign tongues the people would not understand. Both nations would be taken into exile and captivity. Prophesying many years before the exile of Judah, Isaiah warns the people of God's coming judgment and tells them that there would come a day when God would no longer be speaking to them through the Hebrew prophets whom they despised, but through the foreign tongues of the Babylonians. One hundred fifty years after Isaiah, Jeremiah repeats the warning.

Indeed, **He will speak to this people** Through stammering lips and a foreign tongue, (Isa. 28:11 NASB)

"Behold, I am bringing a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel," declares the LORD. "It is an enduring nation, It is an ancient nation, **A nation whose language you do not know, Nor can you understand what they say.** (Jer. 5:15 NASB)

Going back even further, Israel had been forewarned of this day hundreds of years previously in the curses of the covenant pronounced by Moses at the covenant ceremony on Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. Moses foresaw the faithlessness of Israel after his death and said,

"Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things;⁴⁸ therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in the lack of all things; and He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you.⁴⁹"The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, **a nation whose language you shall not understand**, (Deut. 28:47-49 NASB)

This prophecy was fulfilled when Israel was overtaken by Assyria and Judah by Babylonia. As the barbarian hordes of Babylonians swept into Jerusalem, the people of Israel could hear them babbling in foreign **tongues** they did **not understand**. Therefore, the foreign tongues were a sign that God's foretold judgment had come upon unbelieving Israel and Judah just as Moses had warned at the covenant ceremony in Deuteronomy. This is the unbelief to which Paul alludes in v. 22. Tongues are a sign for unbelievers.

So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe. (1 Cor. 14:22 NASB)

Paul refers to the historical fact that the tongues of the Babylonians were a **sign** to unbelieving Jews that God's promised curse had come to realization. Likewise, the tongues being spoken in Acts were a **sign** of God's judgment upon the Jews for refusing to listen to a Prophet much greater than Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, even the promised Messiah Himself, Jesus Christ. Jesus had also forewarned the unbelieving Jews that the kingdom of God would be taken away from them and given to others.

"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and **given to a people, producing the fruit of it**. (Matt. 21:43 NASB)

From the book of Acts, we learn that the **people** Jesus mentions are none other than the Gentiles. This is dramatically foreshadowed on the Day of Pentecost when the Jews from many different Gentile nations heard the gospel in their own language. As Robertson observes,

...the foreign tongues spoken on the day of Pentecost were a sign of covenantal curse for Israel. No longer would God speak exclusively to them in contrast with all the nations of the world. But at the same time, tongues at Pentecost served as a sign of the great blessing of God to all the nations of the world, including Israel. Tongues were a sign of the extension of the blessing of the covenant to all the nations of the world. For even though God took the kingdom from the Jews, he also grafted believers from among them back into the kingdom by his mercy and grace.

For this reason, tongues should be seen as a dramatic sign at a very specific point in redemptive history. They marked the transition to a truly world-wide gospel. For this reason, tongues played a significant role in the history of redemption.¹⁵⁴

God would no longer be speaking in one language (Hebrew) but in every tongue of every nation on earth. Therefore, tongues in the NT were a sign to Israel and the whole world that the religion of Israel no longer belonged exclusively to Jews, but to everyone. Thus, tongues were a sign not only for curse but for blessing. Pentecost was the reversal of Babel when God confused men's languages because of rebellion, but at Pentecost a multitude of tongues (languages) were being employed to unite men together under one faith and one faith-language, so to speak, the language of the gospel. Now that this universality is accomplished, the need for tongues has ceased.

C. General and Particular Sufficiency¹⁵⁵

1. General Sufficiency

We have already seen that 2 Tim. 3: 15-16 refers to the OT but also that the NT writers believed that their written works were also the word of God. In our study of the canon of Scripture, we will find that the NT church had recognized the authority of all the NT epistles, gospels, Acts, and Revelation by the second century, long before the completed NT canon was officially recognized by the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Hippo in 393 AD—although some books were

¹⁵⁴ Robertson, "Tongues Today (?)", emphasis mine.

¹⁵⁵ Much of this section follows Frame's *DWG*, pp. 225-228.

still being debated. The question here is: Why did we need the NT in the first place if the knowledge of salvation and proper Christian behavior could be acquired—according to 2 Tim. 3: 15-16—from the OT.

General sufficiency refers to “the principle that at any point of redemptive history, the revelation given at that time is sufficient.”¹⁵⁶ For example, think of Abraham’s trust in the Lord’s promise of descendants, a trust which resulted in justification.

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; **Your reward shall be very great.**"² Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"³ And Abram said, "Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir."⁴ Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; **but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.**"⁵ And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."⁶ **Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.** (Gen. 15:1-6 NASB)

What, exactly, did Abram believe? Did he believe God was going to send His Son, the second person of the godhead, to be incarnated in human flesh to die on the cross for his sins? No. God had not given Abram the specifics of this promise, although He later gave him a typological hint by commanding him to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22). He had only given him the promise that a descendant would be born **from your own body** and from this descendant Abram would become a **great nation** through which **all the families of the earth will be blessed** (Gen. 12: 1-3). Yet, Abraham’s faith becomes the paradigm (model) for the faith of all believers. Paul quotes Gen. 15: 6 in two epistles as proof for justification by faith alone apart from works (Rom. 4: 3 and Gal. 3: 6). Within the acorn seed of the promise to Abram was the full-grown oak tree of the gospel as well as all the promises of God to believers for all eternity.

For as many as are the promises of God, in Him [*Christ*] they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us. (2 Cor. 1:20 NASB)

Abram’s faith grasped hold of what the Lord had revealed to him at that particular moment in time within revelation history, and what he believed was sufficient for salvation at that time. Earlier, Adam and Eve believed that the seed of the woman would crush Satan’s head. That belief was sufficient for them at that time. They did not know that God would choose Abraham to be the progenitor of the Jewish race which would give birth to the Messiah, and so on. Therefore, we are required to believe everything God has revealed in Scripture up to the time in which we live. Adam and Eve were ethically obligated to believe that their offspring would eventually crush Satan’s head, but they were not obligated to believe that this offspring would be someone coming 4,000 years later. Frame comments on the relationship of the clarity of Scripture and the sufficiency of Scripture.

...Scripture is clear enough to make us responsible for carrying out our present responsibilities to God. Like clarity, sufficiency is an ethical doctrine. It takes away excuses for disobedience. When we violate God’s commandments, we cannot claim that they were unclear, or that they were insufficient.

¹⁵⁶ DWG, p. 226.

So, like clarity, sufficiency is relative to our present duties before God. God's revelation to Adam was sufficient for him to carry out his present duties, but Noah needed more, for he had additional duties. He needed more in order to do God's will in his time.

Similarly, the revelation of the OT was sufficient for the first generation of Christians (2 Tim. 3: 16-17). But God graciously provided them with much more, including the letters of Paul. In God's judgment, these were necessary for the ongoing life of the young church; and when they were collected and distributed, the believers recognized them as God's Word. Once they began to function as God's Word in the church, the OT was no longer sufficient in itself, but it continued to function as part of the canon, which was, as a whole, sufficient.¹⁵⁷

This raises the question of what it is (content) that one is required to believe in order to be saved. Even Muslims believe that God raised up a descendant of Abraham through whom the world would be blessed. They call him Ishmael, not Isaac. Are Muslims saved? No. People are obligated to believe all the words necessary for salvation given by God up to the present age. As Jesus says,

¹⁸ "He who believes **in Him** is not judged; **he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.** (Jn. 3:18 NASB)

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; **no one comes to the Father but through Me.** (Jn. 14:6 NASB)

Jesus did not say that they would be saved if they believed that God exists. James tells us that even Satan's demons are monotheists (James 2: 19), and we may safely assume Satan is included among his fellow demonic monotheists. He also did not say that He is one way among many ways, but **the way**, and that there was no other way to come to the Father. Paul declares that all men without exception believe in the existence of the Creator God (Rom. 1: 18-21), but he insists that men must call upon this God in faith to be saved.

for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON **THE NAME OF THE LORD** WILL BE SAVED." (Rom. 10:13 NASB)

And Peter,

"And there is salvation **in no one else**; for there is **no other name under heaven** that has been given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12 NASB)

Revisiting Paul's words to the Athenians,

"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, **God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,** ³¹ because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, **having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.**" (Acts 17:30-31 NASB)

All people everywhere should repent because proof has been presented that Jesus is God by being raised from the dead. It is essential that this message is published throughout the world—as Paul is doing in Athens—because there is no other message sufficient for salvation at this present time

¹⁵⁷ Frame, *DWG*, p. 126, italicized emphasis his, underlined emphasis mine.

in salvation history. We are not pleading with people to join the Jewish race and believe in Yahweh. Rahab of Jericho did just that and was saved, but this message is now superseded by one that takes God's final Word, Jesus Christ, into account (see "Particular Sufficiency" below.)

for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."¹⁴ **How** then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? **How** will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And **how** will they hear without a preacher?¹⁵ **How** will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!" (Rom. 10:13-15 NASB)

Paul's rhetorical questions demand negative answers. **How** can they trust someone to save them if they do not believe **in Him**? They can't. **How** can they believe in this person if they have never heard of Him? They can't. And **how** can they ever hear about Him if no one presents the message? They can't. And **how** can missionaries (**preacher[s]**) reach them with this message unless they are sent to tell them? They can't. Paul never accommodates the necessity of this sent message for those who haven't yet heard it or who will never hear it. There is no reduction of the message to accommodate one's ignorance of it. Rather, he lays the responsibility of publishing this message upon those who send missionaries and those who are sent.

Does this mean that people will be judged for rejecting a gospel they have never heard? No, for God is just. He will hold a person accountable for what he knows. Moreover, the logic is wrong. How could a person actually reject an unknown message? He can only reject something which is known. Rather, people will go to hell for suppressing their knowledge of the true God clearly revealed in creation, a knowledgeable rejection for which they are **without excuse** (Rom. 1: 18-21).

On the other hand, for those who are elect, God will see to it that the message of the gospel is made accessible to them. As I have stated earlier, God is not limited in His ability to save those whom He has chosen; consequently, He is not limited by His church. If God has chosen the person, He has also chosen the means to his salvation which, according to the bible, is invariably hearing and believing the gospel. If the gospel is not brought to him, then he will be brought to the gospel, like the eunuch from Ethiopia. Ethiopia was not being evangelized in the first century, and we have no record of Paul making a missionary journey there. But this Ethiopian was chosen to hear the gospel preached by Philip. If a person never has the opportunity to hear the gospel, then he is not elect. (Keeping in mind the provisions God has made to those who cannot comprehend either the gospel or the evidence of God in creation: e.g. infants, very young children, the severely mentally retarded.)

2. Particular Sufficiency

While general sufficiency refers to the sufficiency of God's words at any particular time in salvation history, particular sufficiency refers to the finality of the revelation of salvation in Jesus Christ, once and for all. Having spoken this final Word in His Son, God need not give us any further word until the consummation of His kingdom in the second coming of Christ.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Frame, *DWG*, pp. 226-227

God, after He **spoke** long ago **to the fathers in the prophets** in many portions and in many ways, 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. 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. **When He had made purification of sins**, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (Heb. 1:1-3 NASB)¹⁵⁹

Having accomplished redemption (**When He had made purification of sins**), Christ symbolized His completed work by sitting down at the right hand of the Father (**the Majesty on high**). The revelation of Christ's completed work and the revelation of how to apply this complete redemption in our lives—revealed in the Old and NT—is all we need to live the Christian life.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; ³ **seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him** who called us by His own glory and excellence. ⁴ For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, **so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (2 Pet. 1:2-4 NASB)¹⁶⁰

X. The Canon of Scripture—How did we get the Bible?

The Bible was written over a period of roughly 1600 years—from Moses (1500 BC) to the Apostle John's Revelation (90 AD)—by forty or so different authors.¹⁶¹ It did not appear one day “hot off the press” in the form of one complete book but was collected by the church gradually over a period of many years. Carl Henry has noted that probably no individual congregation had a completed collection of the Scriptures until several decades after the last NT book was written.¹⁶² If we assume that the Revelation to John was written about 86-90 A.D., the most accepted dating, then perhaps a few churches would have had a complete collection of the Scriptures by the middle of the second century.

How then did we get our Bible in its completed form? This is the question of canonicity. The word canon is a Greek word which originally meant a staff or straight rod and came to be associated with the idea of a standard or rule. As we find the word used in Galatians 6: 16, it is used to designate the rule of faith.¹⁶³ The canon of Scripture is the list of books which are recognized by the church to be endowed with God's authority.

It is by design that we have saved the subject of canonicity for last. The material presented thus far in previous sections including the witness of the OT to itself, Jesus' use of the OT, etc., already provides much of the useful data in determining the issue of canonicity.

¹⁵⁹ Cited by Frame, p. 227.

¹⁶⁰ Cited by Frame, p. 227.

¹⁶¹ Some books of the Bible do not specify the author; thus, we are left with the question of how many different authors composed all the books of the Bible.

¹⁶² C.F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, Vol. IV, p.442

¹⁶³ Edward J. Young, “The Canon of the Old Testament”, p.155, in *Revelation and the Bible*, Carl F. H. Henry, ed.).

A. The Canon of the Old Testament

The OT was a written record of the covenant law reminding the Israelites that God’s written word was a witness against any future infidelity (Deut. 31: 24-29). The first canon was the two tablets of the law—the old covenant. The second addition to this canon was Deuteronomy, the second publication of the Law of Moses. To this was added Joshua. “So at every stage of Israel’s history, there was a canon, a definite body of divine writings, that spoke to the nation and its individuals with supreme authority.”¹⁶⁴

As we have shown, all the OT prophets spoke with the confidence that what they said was the very word of God; therefore, it is not likely that the books of the OT were circulated for very long among the Jews before being recognized as divinely authoritative or canonical. Recognition of these books as authoritative by the ancient Jews was immediate, not gradual.

This is not the view of liberal theologians who have for some time held to a late date for the collection of OT books into a canon. This assumes that their authority had to be determined by the corporate testimony of the Jewish community. In their view, the Torah, or Law (Genesis through Deuteronomy), was officially accepted as canonical through Ezra’s ministry in 444 B.C. The recognition of the prophets as authoritative took place much later at about 200 B.C., and the writings (including the psalms, wisdom literature, Daniel, etc.) were not officially recognized until the so-called Council of Jamnia in 90 A.D. This hypothesis naturally depends upon the late dating of the OT books themselves, a dating which is by no means accepted among conservative scholars.¹⁶⁵ Archer, one such conservative scholar, points out that:

The biblical authors indicate very clearly, whenever the matter comes up, that the various books of the Bible were canonical from the moment of their inception, by virtue if the divine authority (“Thus saith the Lord”) behind them, and the books received immediate recognition and acceptance by the faithful as soon as they were made aware of the writings.¹⁶⁶

Archer recognizes a more plausible view of canonicity in which the Holy Spirit gave authority to the Scriptures which He produced, and this testimony of the Spirit (see above) was followed by “recognition, faith, and submission in the hearts of God’s people who walked in covenant fellowship with Him”.¹⁶⁷ In fact, as he points out, no other valid means were available for determining scriptural authority. No “mechanical tests” could be established for determining which books of the OT were from God, and which were not, according to some fallible human opinion. It is more reasonable to believe that the books were received by the faithful immediately on the basis of a divine quality which already existed in the books themselves.¹⁶⁸ In other words, no authority could be imposed upon the Scriptures from the outside by some ecclesiastical council, but the authority which they already possessed by virtue of their divine authorship was simply recognized. Archer illustrates.

¹⁶⁴ Frame, *DWG*, p. 135

¹⁶⁵ Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, pp. 78-79

¹⁶⁶ Archer, p. 79

¹⁶⁷ Archer, p. 76

¹⁶⁸ Archer, p. 77

When a child recognizes his own parent from a multitude of other adults, he does not impart any new quality of parenthood by such an act; he simply recognizes a relationship which already exists. So also with lists of authoritative books drawn up by ecclesiastical synods or councils. They did not impart canonicity to a single page of Scripture; they simply acknowledged the divine inspiration of religious documents which were inherently canonical from the time they were first composed, and formally rejected other books for which canonicity had been falsely claimed.¹⁶⁹

E. J. Young, another conservative scholar, raises serious objections to the late canonization of the Pentateuch in Ezra's day (444 B.C.) By the Biblical account in Ezra 7: 6, Ezra was "a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses" indicating that there was nothing new about the Law of Moses at this time but was already accepted among the Jews. Further evidence of this is found in chapter 8 when Artaxerxes, king of Persia, commissions Ezra to appoint magistrates and judges who are acquainted with the laws of Ezra's God (v. 25), something which would have been impossible if the Law had not yet been officially canonized.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, not much about Israel's history makes sense if the Law of God was not widely recognized until Ezra.

Israel's exile was the result of disobedience to the Law of God revealed in the Pentateuch, and all the prophets throughout Israel's history warned of the judgment to come for disobedience to that very Law. The curses of the Law were no secret, but well-published in Deuteronomy 27 and 28, curses to which the prophets continually appeal (e.g. Jer. 11: 1-5; Mal. 3: 8-9; Micah 6: 10-13). Of course, modern liberal scholars would like us to believe that much of the prophetic literature was composed after the exile and not before. In this way, they can present a non-supernatural explanation of why the prophets were so accurate in their prediction of Israel's apostasy and exile and the rise and fall of powerful nations (Jer. 25: 11-12; Dan. 2: 31-49; 7—8; 11). There is, however, no solid evidence and much speculation and circular reasoning to prove this assertion.

In his defense of the Jewish nation, *Against Apion*, the Jewish historian Josephus (37-96 A.D.) makes some interesting observations about the traditionally accepted OT canon of his day.

We have not tens of thousands of books, discordant and conflicting, but only twenty-two [note: many of the O.T. books of the English Bible are combined in the Hebrew Bible to make 22 instead of 39], containing the record of all time, which have been justly believed. And of these, five are the books of Moses, which embrace the laws and the tradition from the creation of man until his death. From the death of Moses to the reign of Artaxerxes, the successor of Xerxes, king of Persia, the prophets who succeeded Moses wrote what was done in thirteen books. The remaining four books embrace hymns to God and counsels for men for the conduct of life. From Artaxerxes until our time everything has been recorded, but has not been deemed worthy of like credit with what preceded, because the exact succession of the prophets ceased. But what faith we have placed in our own writings is evident by our conduct; for though so long a time has now passed, no one has dared either to add anything to them, or to alter anything in them.¹⁷¹

Henry notes three significant points about this quotation: (1) First, the canonical books "come from a succession of divinely authorized writers." (2) Second, there were other writings which did not

¹⁶⁹ Archer, p. 77

¹⁷⁰ E. J. Young, "The Canon of the Old Testament", p. 161, in *Revelation and the Bible*, C.F.H. Henry, ed.

¹⁷¹ Josephus, quoted from Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. IV., pp. 410-411

have the same authority because they didn't compare favorably with the scriptural writings. (3) Third, the "comprehensive canon" was completed in the time of Ezra who came to Jerusalem during the reign of Artaxerses (reigning from 465-425 B.C.).¹⁷² This canon included not only the Pentateuch but also the prophets and writings, which, according to the modern view, were not canonized until 200 B.C. and A.D. 100 respectively. But according to Josephus, nothing new was added to the Hebrew canon from the time of Artaxerses.

At the end of the day, one's view of the canonicity of the OT depends on his presuppositions (basic assumptions). That is to say, does he believe in a supernatural God or not? And does he believe that this supernatural God has made a sovereign effort to communicate His will and plan of salvation to man? If one's god is too small, then he will dismiss all the "**thus says the Lord**" and "**the Lord said unto me**" statements in the OT out of hand as being impossible. On the other hand, if his God is big—sovereign and all-powerful—then the possibility of a God who reveals the future to His prophets before it happens, and who acts to save us, is not at all unreasonable, but perfectly logical. The conclusions a person reaches concerning the canon of Scripture really is already decided apriori (before the facts are examined).

For this reason, E.J. Young insists,

At the outset we affirm the question of the divine authority of the Old Testament has validity only on the grounds of Christian theism. Only if Christian theism is true can the idea of canonicity itself have validity and meaning.¹⁷³

If Christian theism is not true, all talk of an authoritative canon is irrelevant since the Scriptures are merely the words of uninspired men whose authority is limited to the importance other men impose upon them. The concept of an authoritative word then becomes purely arbitrary (not based on fixed rules) and utilitarian (useful but not necessarily true). Under this scheme, one book placed in the canon is just as good as another. On the other hand if Christian theism is true, then God communicated His will and plan to some writers and not to others and also providentially directed His church to recognize some of these writings as inspired by the Holy Spirit, but not others.

At this point, it is important for us to reemphasize the testimony of Christ and the NT apostles. Both Jesus and the apostles express the same confidence in the OT prophets as the OT prophets did in their own pronouncements and regarded the entire OT as divinely authoritative. Throughout the NT the "writings" (translated "Scriptures") were referred to authoritatively not only as individual passages but as a whole. At times Jesus would cite an individual passage (Matt. 21: 42; 22: 32, 37, 44; 4: 4, 7, 10; Lk. 4: 18-19), and at other times He would offer His endorsement of the entire OT encompassed in the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms—the three-fold division of the OT (Lk. 24: 27, 44; Jn. 5: 39; Matt. 5: 17-18; Jn. 10: 35).

The apostolic writers also cite the authority of both individual passages and the "writings" (Acts 2: 17-21; 4: 25-26; Rom. 3: 10-18; 4: 7-8; Rom. 1: 2; 15: 4; 1 Cor. 15: 3-4; 1 Tim. 4: 13; 2 Tim. 3: 16; James 2: 8; 1 Pet. 2: 6; 2 Pet. 1: 20; 3: 16). In Romans 3: 2 Paul cites the "oracles of God" as the single greatest benefit (note the words, "First of all") bestowed upon the Jewish people.

¹⁷² Henry, p. 411

¹⁷³ Young, p. 57

From the context, the most likely referent is the whole collection of OT Scriptures. Murray points out that it would be unlikely for Paul to single out any particular part of the Scriptures for this distinction to the exclusion of others.¹⁷⁴ Calvin says it is “the covenant which God revealed first to Abraham and to his posterity, and afterwards sealed and unfolded by the law and the Prophets”.¹⁷⁵

Later in Romans Paul elaborates further on God’s favor to the Jews saying, “...to whom belongs the adoption of sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises...” (9: 4), once again implying a body of literature encompassing far more than merely the Law of Moses, but also the Prophets and Writings both of which contain the multitude of God’s covenant promises to Israel. The anguish of heart concerning his “kinsmen according to the flesh” finds its source in the rejection of the gospel by the Jews in spite of the unparalleled privileges which they enjoyed as the covenant nation, privileges which, according to the context of the passage, are not new privileges but ancient privileges. The spiritual blindness which the Jews had demonstrated throughout their history (cf. Acts 7) is rendered more culpable on the grounds of continued rejection of centuries of special revelation.

The above Scriptural evidence lends itself to the conclusion that by the time of Jesus’ ministry, the whole canon of the OT was fully developed and recognized by the Jewish people. There was never one word of controversy between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees concerning the authority of the OT Scriptures. The only controversy was that arising from Pharisaical traditions which had been added to Scripture.¹⁷⁶ It is also helpful to remember that 278 specific quotations and allusions (indirect references) to the OT are made in the NT by Jesus and the apostles—94 from the Pentateuch, 99 from the Prophets, and 85 from the Writings. Only seven books of the OT are not specifically referred to (Judges, Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah.) Also significant is that not one citation of the Old Testament *Apocrypha* is found in the NT, a body of literature accepted as canonical by the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁷⁷

B. The Canon of the New Testament

The list of books included in the NT has been disputed by Roman Catholics and Protestants even since the time of the Reformation, and the list has also been different in individual churches at various times during the first four centuries. The NT books quoted by the church father Irenaeus (until his death in 202 AD) is very close to the present canon, including all the NT books except Philemon, 2 Peter, 3 John, and Jude. This is significant because Irenaeus was much concerned about biblical authority in his battle against the Marcion heresy that argued against the deity of Christ. However, we should not expect to find a list of NT books within the pages of the NT since the canon had not been completed at the time of their being written.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 92-93. In their commentaries on Romans, Martin Lloyd Jones and Charles Hodge agree with Murray’s interpretation.

¹⁷⁵ Essentially agreeing with Murray and others. See John Calvin, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 114

¹⁷⁶ Young, p. 157

¹⁷⁷ Roger Nicole, “New Testament Use of the Old”, p. 138, *Revelation and the Bible*, Henry, ed. Note: Nicole includes Chronicles, previously one single book, as being one that has no citation in the NT. However, Jesus refers to it in Lk. 11: 51. Cf. 2 Chron. 24: 20-24.

¹⁷⁸ Frame, *DWG*, pp. 133-134

Roman Catholic tradition holds that “the church is the mother of the scriptures.” In other words, the NT canon was collected under the watchful eye of the infallible authority of the church whose authority, in turn, can be traced to the apostles. The Reformed church denies any such claim for the church, insisting that the authority of the NT is derived in the same way as the authority of the OT, from God alone who gives witness of Himself in the Scriptures.

The question, to what does the Canon owe its position of authority, can by the Church be answered in only one way: It derives this from God. For whatever comes to us with the highest authority in matters of faith and life can only be dependent upon God himself. Authority comes, not from below, but from above.¹⁷⁹

But how did this authority “from above” practically impose itself upon the churches “below”? Most assuredly there is no scriptural or historical evidence of a voice from heaven saying to them, “Accept this book and reject that one.” The NT canon developed among the ancient churches according to the functional use made of particular books to the exclusion of others. Some books of the NT had the marks of apostolicity¹⁸⁰ and authority, and others didn’t. It was not the prerogative of church councils to draw up lists of books which were then forced upon the churches to use in their worship services (the Roman Catholic view). Rather, the churches were already making use of those books which had the accompanying witness of the Holy Spirit. The church councils, in response, compiled lists of books which had the history of use. F.F. Bruce further explains,

The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and generally apostolic authority, direct or indirect. The first ecclesiastical councils to classify the canonical books were both held in North Africa—at Hippo Regius in 393 and at Carthage in 397—but what these councils did was not to impose something new upon the Christian communities but to codify what was already the general practice of those communities.¹⁸¹

While the development of the complete canon was a gradual process, there is no indication that individual NT books were not received immediately as the inspired word of God—as were the OT books. Indeed, this is precisely the way the apostles expected their writings to be received (1 Thess. 4: 2; 5: 27; 2 Thess. 2: 15; 3: 14; Col. 4: 16).

So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us. (2 Thessalonians 2:15 NASB)

³⁷ If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. (1 Corinthians 14:36-37 NASB)

When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter *that is coming* from Laodicea. (Col. 4:16 NASB)

¹⁷⁹ Herman Ridderbos, “The Canon of the New Testament”, p. 190, *Revelation and the Bible*, Henry, ed.

¹⁸⁰ Or apostolic association, as in the Gospels of Luke and Mark. Luke was associated with Paul, Mark with Peter.

¹⁸¹ Bruce, *The New Testament Documents—Are They Reliable*, p. 27. Quoted from Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. 4, p. 416

Furthermore, they accepted no counterfeit substitutes to their own letters or to the instructions they had given the church (2 Thess. 3: 17; Gal. 1: 8-9).

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write. (2 Thessalonians 3:17 NASB)

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Gal. 1:8-9 NASB)

Does this sound like someone in doubt about his apostolic authority? Just imagine the scene of two members of the churches in Galatia sitting in the audience listening to Paul’s letter being read. One turns to the other and asks, “Is this letter in the canon yet?” “No,” says the other member. “So don’t worry about it.”

Paul’s instructions on marriage (1 Cor. 7), which some have wrongly interpreted as merely friendly advice (v. 12) had no less the force of “commandment”, a fact borne out in v. 17 of that chapter: “And thus I direct in all the churches.” Such commandments pertaining to marriage would have dubious benefit to the original audience if recognition of their authority had to be postponed for a hundred years until the completed canon was officially recognized. Likewise, his warnings to the Galatians would have had no effect in preventing their apostasy if not immediately discerned as a warning from the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul (Gal. 1: 1-8). The same can be said for the repeated warnings found in Hebrews.

For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty,³ how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, (Heb. 2:2-3 NASB)

DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, (Heb. 3:8 NASB)

Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. (Heb. 3:12 NASB)

We have already shown from 2 Pet. 3: 16 and Lk. 10: 7 that the apostles placed the writings of their fellow apostles alongside the OT as the authoritative word of God. Additionally, the early church fathers quote the writings of the apostles alongside the OT Scriptures. Polycarp (A.D. 115) quotes Ps. 4: 4 along with Eph. 4: 26 saying,

“In the sacred books [that is, in the OT],...as it is said in these Scriptures [the NT Scriptures], ‘Be angry and sin not,’ and ‘Let not the sun go down upon your wrath’ So, a few years later, the so-called second letter of Clement, after quoting Isaiah, adds (ii. 4): “And another Scripture, however, says, ‘I came not to call the righteous, but sinners’” —quoting from Matthew, a book which Barnabas (*circa* 97-106 A.D.) had already adduced as Scripture. After this such quotations are common.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 412, words in brackets mine

Warfield continues by emphasizing the significance of the quotations above.

What needs emphasis at present about these facts is that they obviously are not evidences of a gradually-heightening estimate of the New Testament books, originally received on a lower level and just beginning to be tentatively [hesitantly] accounted Scripture; they are conclusive evidences rather of the estimation of the New Testament books from the very beginning as Scripture, and of their attachment as Scripture to the other Scriptures already in hand. The early Christians did not, then, first form a rival “canon” of “new books” which came only gradually to be accounted as of equal divinity and authority with the “old books”; they received new book after new book from the apostolical circle, as equally “Scripture” with the old books, and added them one by one to the collection of old books as additional Scriptures, until at length the new books thus added were numerous enough to be looked upon as another *section* of the Scriptures [the NT].¹⁸³

Warfield refers to this process as the “increasing canon” of the NT similar to the increasing canon which developed among the Jewish nation from the writings of Moses to Malachi.¹⁸⁴ “From this viewpoint,” Henry adds,

...the increasing canon was complete as soon as the last New Testament book was written and officially read in the congregation to which it was sent [possibly around 90 A.D.]

Absent from any study of the sacred literary activity of the early church age is any evidence of a time when certain letters came gradually to be considered divinely authoritative. There is nothing to support the notion of a time span during which spiritual literature came slowly to be set apart and increasingly venerated [respected] and finally exalted to equality alongside the Old Testament writings.¹⁸⁵

The acceptance of NT writings upon the authority of church councils—the opposing theory—would have come far too late for the church since these councils came almost 350 years after Christ. Superficially the Roman Catholic Church may appeal to a canon sanctioned on the authority of an infallible pope who traces his lineage and authority back to the Apostle Peter, but this appeal is groundless. Although it officially confirmed the list of canonical books at the Council of Trent (1546-1563), it was not until 1870 at the first Vatican Council that the pope was declared infallible when speaking *ex cathedra* (in the official position as head of the church). Papal infallibility was never claimed before 1870 leaving the church bereft of an infallible Bible (according to this theory) for almost nineteen centuries.¹⁸⁶

There was more than one single test for the inclusion of a book into the canon. Irenaeus (A.D. 180) presented three main tests including apostolicity, content, and the corporate witness of “one or more of the leading churches”.¹⁸⁷ The last test is doubtful and lends itself to the Roman Catholic claim that the “church is the mother of the Scriptures”. The other two are more helpful. Apostolicity meant that it was either written by one of the apostles or by someone closely associated with them—for example, James, the brother of Jesus. But having the name of an apostle

¹⁸³ Warfield, pp. 412-413, emphasis his, words in brackets mine

¹⁸⁴ Warfield, p. 412; see also Henry, p. 438

¹⁸⁵ Henry, p. 439

¹⁸⁶ Henry, p. 416; see also Loraine Boettner, “The Infallibility of the Pope”, *Roman Catholicism*, pp. 235-253

¹⁸⁷ Henry, p. 437

attached to the book was not enough in itself. The content of the book could not be contrary to the established doctrine of the church.¹⁸⁸ There were other books which claimed apostolic authorship: the *Apocalypse of Peter*, the *Acts of Paul*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Gospel of Philip*; but the content of these books did not bear the marks of a genuine apostolic source. According to Robert McL. Wilson, with the exception of the first two,

...none of these works has ever been accorded recognition or authority in any branch of the Christian tradition. It is important to emphasize this, since it is sometimes suggested that the canonical NT is the result of an arbitrary selection by the Church from a large mass of documents which had an equal claim to recognition. Comparison of the apocryphal NT with the canonical books is itself sufficient to reveal the inferiority of the former...As James says...“there is no question of any one’s having excluded them from the New Testament; they have done that for themselves” [quoting M.R. James].¹⁸⁹

Continuing with his analysis, Wilson notes:

The primary significance of all these documents is that they serve as a foil [that which enhances something else by contrast] to set off the comparative sobriety [moderation] and restraint of the canonical gospels and reveal what can happen when imagination and legendary embellishment [exaggeration] are allowed free play. Often they take over and expand or elaborate canonical material, but when they are original and independent they are seldom reliable. There is, therefore, little (if any) authentic tradition about Jesus which has not been included in the gospels.¹⁹⁰

We will turn briefly to those apocryphal books which are accepted by the Roman Catholic Church as canonical and of equal authority to the OT: *Tobit*, *Judith*, *Wisdom*, *Ecclesiasticus*, *Baruch*, *I and II Maccabees*, and some additions to Esther and Daniel. Though these books can fill out some of the historical material of the intertestamental period between the Old and New Testaments, their doctrinal integrity is lacking. The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory can be supported from 2 Maccabees 12: 41 ff.; justification by faith plus works from Tobit 12: 9; 14: 10-11; Ecclesiasticus 3: 30 and 1 Maccabees: 2: 52. The Book of Wisdom teaches a “divine creation out of preexistent matter and of emanation”.¹⁹¹ The Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Judas, though supported by some to have a place in the canon, express a form of Gnosticism condemned by the early church.¹⁹²

While appealing repeatedly to the OT, neither Jesus nor the apostles appealed to the authority of the apocryphal books, and even the apocryphal writers made no claim to being divinely inspired. The early church readily attended to the authority of the OT Scriptures and the “increasing canon” of the NT as it was progressively collected, but never recognized the apocryphal books. As early as 340 A.D. Athanasius, champion of the Nicene orthodoxy (against Arian, who claimed Christ was created), developed a list of inspired books which is identical to the NT canon we now possess while identifying the other books as apocryphal—of doubtful authorship or authenticity.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ Henry, p. 437

¹⁸⁹ Robert McL. Wilson, “Apocryphal New Testament”, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, p. 210; see also the comment by Bruce M. Metzger quoted by G. Douglas Young, “The Apocrypha”, *Revelation and the Bible*, C.F.H. Henry, p. 172).

¹⁹⁰ Wilson, p. 212, words in brackets mine

¹⁹¹ Henry, p. 415

¹⁹² Frame, p. 133

¹⁹³ Henry, p. 414-415, 445; see also G. Douglas Young, p. 175

The OT was a written record of the covenant law reminding the Israelites that God's written word was a witness against any future infidelity (Deut. 31: 24-29). The first canon was the two tablets of the law—the old covenant. The second addition to this canon was Deuteronomy, the second publication of the Law of Moses. To this was added Joshua. "So at every stage of Israel's history, there was a canon, a definite body of divine writings, that spoke to the nation and its individuals with supreme authority."¹⁹⁴ In the same way, God intended His new covenant people to be ruled by a written document declaring His personal word to them. Given this premise, it would be a strange departure from the norm for God to deny the church access to these documents, particularly since our salvation depends upon such access. Consequently, the "tradition" of the apostles was preserved from distortion from generation to generation in written documents.

Therefore, the question of an authoritative canon of NT books cannot rest upon the reasoning of modern scholars who presume to be able to determine which books are worthy of acceptance and which are not. In this case, the human authority of the Roman Catholic Church has simply been replaced by another human authority—modern "scholarship". Rather, we must presuppose "that God will not allow his people to walk in darkness, that he will provide for us the words we need to have, within our reach."¹⁹⁵ After all, what would be the point of God going to the trouble of inspiring the NT writers without also preserving what He inspired through the written record?

In OT times, the Scriptures were deposited in the tabernacle and later the temple. The temple was destroyed in 70 AD, and church buildings were not constructed until the fourth century; yet God deposited His written word in the church, the people of God. Moreover, although the doctrines of the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, etc. had been hammered out over several hundred years, the church was remarkably united in their view of the canon. When Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, Egypt published a list of books accepted by his church in 367, there is no evidence of dissent elsewhere in the church. Moreover, this consensus has persisted since that time in Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant traditions.¹⁹⁶

The reason for this consensus, Frame says, is that "Jesus' sheep heard his voice (John 10: 27). Or to put it differently, the Holy Spirit illumined the texts so that God's people perceived their divine quality." The assurance was supernatural.¹⁹⁷

This canon is now closed. Nothing else will be added because of the definitive work of Christ to which nothing can be added. While Abraham needed more revelation than Noah, and Noah more than Adam,¹⁹⁸ we may ask: What additional revelation is needed by the church that God has withheld for over 2000 years. While it is conceivable that Paul's lost letter(s) to Corinth could one day be found, we would wonder why God waited so long for them to be discovered. We may also ask: If God is still giving individual Christians additional revelation through prophecy, how can it be said that this additional revelation is not authoritative for the whole church?

¹⁹⁴ Frame, *DWG*, p. 135

¹⁹⁵ Frame, *DWG*, p. 136

¹⁹⁶ Frame, *DWG*, p. 136. Wilson dates this list at 340 AD. I don't know which dating is closest.

¹⁹⁷ Frame, *DWG*, pp. 136-137

¹⁹⁸ Frame, *DWG*, p. 139

C. Conclusion

In conclusion, we may be assured that the books we now have in our possession in the Old and New Testaments are the very same books which have been providentially handed down to God's people from the beginning of salvation history. Furthermore, we may be assured that modern scholarship—so-called—will reveal no serious threat to the existing canon of the Old or New Testaments. Much ink has been spilled in the 20th century and now into the 21st century challenging the authorship of many Pauline epistles and other books of the NT. A great majority of these challenges are built upon reasoning which sets out with a conclusion and selects evidence to support the conclusion, rejecting all other evidence—what logicians call special pleading. Warfield will have the final word.

The question is not whether the doctrine of plenary inspiration has difficulties to face. The question is, whether these difficulties are greater than the difficulty of believing that the whole church of God from the beginning has been deceived in her estimate of the Scriptures committed to her charge—greater than the difficulty of believing that the whole college of the apostles, yes and Christ himself at their head, were themselves deceived as to the nature of those Scriptures which they gave the church as its precious possession, and have deceived with them twenty Christian centuries, and are likely to deceive twenty more before our boasted advancing light¹⁹⁹ has corrected their error—are greater than the difficulty of believing that we have no sure foundation for our faith and no certain warrant for our trust in Christ for salvation. We believe this doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures primarily because it is the doctrine which Christ and his apostles believed, and which they have taught us. It may sometimes seem difficult to take our stand frankly by the side of Christ and his apostles. It will always be found safe.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Modern higher criticism of the Bible. Warfield is being sarcastic.

²⁰⁰ Warfield, p. 128