ARE THE BIBLES IN OUR POSSESSION INSPIRED?
TWO STUDIES ON THE INSPIREDNESS OF THE APOGRAPHS

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PART ONE: THE INSPIRATION AND "INSPIREDNESS" OF SCRIPTURE: A PROPOSAL

THE CONCEPT OF INSPIRATION

Inspiration as a theological term pertaining to the inscripturation of revelation has been defined in a variety of ways. Some, such as Theodore Parker and Francis W. Newman, have defined it as such natural insight into religious things as is common to all men. Others, such as W. N. Clarke and Olin C. Curtis, have held that inspiration is such spiritual exaltation and insight as is common to all Christians. Still others, such as Augustus Hopkins Strong and James Orr, have advocated the view that inspiration is a supernatural exaltation and guidance of the human faculties of chosen men, which guidance is sometimes infallible and sometimes fallible. Yet others, such as Charles Hodge, William G. T. Shedd, Benjamin B. Warfield, Lewis Sperry Chafer and Louis Berkhof, have proposed the idea that inspiration is infallible supernatural guidance of the human faculties of chosen men. And finally, there have been a few, such as G. Voetius and the authors of the Swiss Formula of Consensus of 1675, who have asserted that inspiration is infallible supernatural control of the human mechanical reproduction of divine words. These views, calling attention primarily to the mode of inspiration, have respectively
been called the Intuition View, the Illumination View, the Dynamic View, the Organic View, and the Dictation View.

One definition of inspiration, expressive of the Organic View, states that:

Inspiration is a special act of the Holy Spirit by which He guided the writers of the books of sacred Scripture, so that their words should convey the thoughts He wished conveyed, should bear a proper relationship to the thoughts of the other books of Scripture, and should be kept free from error in thought, fact, doctrine and judgment.

It is instructive to note that in this definition inspiration is a special, extraordinary, supernatural act of the Holy Spirit; and that this act pertains to the writers of sacred Scripture at the time of their writing. As such, inspiration refers to the sacred writings as originally penned (the autographs), and says nothing about subsequent copies, versions or translations (the apographs, as they are called). Although this view of inspiration was commonly held by evangelical Christians in the first half of the twentieth century (with some exceptions), it may no longer be taken for granted as the view of those who profess to be evangelical.

In recent years we have seen much controversy among evangelicals on the question of the nature and extent of inspiration. This polemic has been stimulated and abetted by such works as Dewey Beegle's *The Inspiration of Scripture* (1963), H. M. Kuittert's *Do You Understand What You Read?* (1970), Beegle's *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility* (1973), and G. C. Berkouwer's *Holy Scripture*, published in English translation in 1975. In addition, we have seen several crucial exchanges on the subject in the *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* and the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. Echoes of the deep cleavage among evangelical leaders over inerrancy are still reverberating from the Wenham Conference on Scripture, held some years ago on the campus of Gordon-Conwell School of Theology. And now our attention to the divergence among evangelicals on inspiration and inerrancy is once more directed by Harold Lindsell's book *The Battle for the Bible*, published in 1976.

The issue has become so sharp that Lindsell raises the question of whether the term "evangelical" should be redefined. He says:

Is the term "evangelical" broad enough in its meaning to include within it believers in inerrancy and believers in an inerrancy limited to matters of faith and practice? . . . It seems to me that those who believe in inerrancy are left with little choice except to stand for a definition of "evangelical" that includes in it the notion of biblical inerrancy.1

Now if a concept of inspiration which implies inerrancy is such a crucial issue to evangelical Christianity, we ought to be able to find it in Scripture. Let us then proceed to the Scriptures themselves, to discover what the Bible tells us concerning the nature and extent of its own inspiration. By way of format let us consider what the Bible says concerning the elements included in the act of inspiration, and what it says concerning the effects resulting from the act of inspiration.

**THE ELEMENTS INCLUDED IN THE ACT OF INSPIRATION**

1. The first element may be expressed as follows: all Scripture is God-breathed, i.e., has come from God's mouth. This element is found in 2 Tim 3:16. There we read, "pasa graphe theopneustos kai ophelimos pros . . . " Since there has been much controversy concerning the grammar of this verse, let us examine it in detail. The subject of the sentence is graphe, which means "something written." The English word "scripture" also means "something written," but
it has come to mean in contemporary usage "the sacred writings of a religion," or "a body of writings considered as authoritative." As B. B. Warfield point out, however, graphe is used in the New Testament to denote "the sacred writings of the Old and New Testaments," or as we call them, "the Scriptures," not merely "something written," and certainly not "the sacred writings" of another religion. Since graphe is modified by the adjective pasa, whatever the verse is stating about graphe, it is stating about "all" or "every" sacred writing of the Old and New Testaments.

Following graphe there are two adjectives, the syntax of which has occasioned problems for translators. These adjectives are theopneustos and ophelimos. Theopneustos means "God-breathed" and ophelimos means "profitable" or "valuable" or "useful" or "beneficial." But what is the grammatical arrangement of these adjectives? Should the translation read (with both adjectives attributive): "All God-breathed and profitable Scripture (is) for teaching, etc."? Or should it read (with one adjective attributive and one predicate): "All God-breathed Scripture is profitable for teaching, etc."? Or should it read (with both adjectives predicate): "All Scripture (is) God-breathed and (is) profitable for teaching, etc."? The first translation is extremely awkward, since "profitable" is a word which seems to need completion ("profitable" for what purpose or end?), and the completion words, which follow in the prepositional phrases "for teaching," "for refutation of error," etc., are separated from the word "profitable" by the word "Scripture." The second translation, though possible, is in need of justification, since it makes one adjective attributive and the other predicate. The third translation, which renders both adjectives as predicate, would appear to be both smooth and consistent "All Scripture (is) God-breathed and (is) profitable for teaching, for refutation of error, for correction of faults, for discipline in righteousness."

Taking this third translation, then, as the best rendering of the Greek text, we learn that all Scripture, i.e., every part of the Old and New Testaments, is God-breathed. The meaning of the word theopneustos does not appear to be that God took human words or human instruments and breathed into them (which could be inferred from the word "inspiration"), but rather that God breathed and from His mouth came Scripture. This conception builds upon a phenomenon which would commonly have been known in the first century -- that of exhaling air in speaking.

2. The second element included in the act of inspiration may be expressed as follows: the men who wrote Scripture were borne up, carried along, in their writing, by the Holy Spirit. This element is found in 2 Pet 1:21, where we read, "For not by the will of man came prophecy at any time, but being borne up (or carried along) by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God." That this does not refer to oral prophetic declarations may be seen from verse 20, where the propheteia of which Peter is speaking is the written propheteia, the propheteia graphes, the "prophecy of Scripture." Among other things, this verse tells us that the initial impulse to set down such events and such interpretation of events in the history of revelation as God wished recorded, and the subsequent enablement and guidance to select such events and such interpretation of events in the history of revelation as God wished included both came from the Holy Spirit of God. On the one hand, prophecy did not come by the will of man; on the other hand, men spoke from God as they were borne up and carried along by the Holy Spirit.

3. The third element included in the act of inspiration is this: that in one sense the men who wrote Scripture did not write from themselves, but from God. This element is also found in 2 Pet 1:21, at the end, where we read that elalesan apo theou anthropoi "men spoke from God."

4. The fourth element included in the act of inspiration is this: that in a different sense, the men who wrote Scripture did write from themselves. This element has reference to all of those
aspects of writing included under the general term "style." A writer's style marks his writing as peculiarly his. In this regard the writers of Scripture display variegated styles, evincing their social, cultural, educational and vocational backgrounds. They employ varied vocabularies, use different grammatical constructions, prefer distinct types of discourse (narrative, descriptive, explanatory or argumentative), and even display differing degrees of psychological and emotional depth. Thus their writings reveal something of the human authors, as well as something of the divine Author of Scripture. This element may be found in many instances, both in the Old and New Testaments.

THE EFFECTS RESULTING FROM THE ACT OF INSPIRATION

Earlier we proposed that the Bible also has something to say concerning the effects resulting from the act of inspiration. Let us proceed to these.

1. The first effect may be expressed thusly: all Scripture is the Word of God. 2 Tim 3:16 tells us that all Scripture is God-breathed. The effect of God's breathing out of Scripture is that all of Scripture is His Word. This seeming truism takes on meaning as we consider one important fact: Scripture includes statements made by Satan, by demons, by ungodly men, and by godly men speaking foolishly, as well as the record of ordinary, garden-variety history. But (and this is what is important) as a result of inspiration all of Scripture is the Word of God! The apostle Paul echoes this effect when he tells the believers at Corinth, "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 Cor 14:37).

2. The second effect may be expressed thusly: all of Scripture is profitable for the complete equipping of the man of God for life and godliness. This effect is found in 2 Tim 3:16-17, where we read that "all Scripture (is) God-breathed and (is) profitable for teaching, for refutation of error, for correction of faults, for discipline in righteousness, that the man of God may be fully qualified, having been equipped for every good work." This matter of profitableness occasions a question which frequently has arisen in recent discussion of Scripture: are there degrees of profitableness? And if so, are there degrees of inspiration?

This question may be highlighted by two quotations from Dewey Beegle's *The Inspiration of Scripture*. He states:

Some of the great hymns are practically on a par with the psalms, and one can be sure that if Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, Augustus Toplady, and Reginald Heber had lived in the time of David and Solomon, and been no more inspired than they were in their own day [Beegle's italics], some of their hymns of praise to God would have found their way into the Hebrew canon.

Beegle states further:

Undoubtedly, God's Spirit spoke in this vital way to the troubled soul of George Matheson (the Scottish minister who wrote "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go"). This is the kind of inspiration of which the psalms were made. There is no difference in kind. If there is any difference, it is a matter of degree.

At this point I should like to introduce some distinctions regarding the question of degrees distinctions between inspiration, authority and value. With respect to *inspiration*, I would propose the disjunctive: either Scripture is inspired (i.e., God-breathed), or it is not. Either men spoke from God, or they did not. In the nature of the case, degrees of inspiration are not
possible. With respect to authority, I think we must make a distinction between the authority of historical truth and the authority of contemporary normativeness. With regard to the authority of historical truth, we must say: either this account in Scripture is historically true (i.e., factual), or it is not; there are no degrees involved. With regard to the authority of contemporary normativeness, I believe we must say: either this law, exhortation, teaching, or example is binding upon our obedience today, or it is not; there are no degrees involved. With respect to value, I believe it is permissible and proper to speak of degrees in Scripture. I believe that although no portion of Scripture is more inspired than another, and although no portion is more authoritative than another (either historically or normatively), yet some portions of Scripture are more valuable than others. I believe that a portion which states a basic condition of salvation is more valuable than one which mentions an obscure personage in a tribal enumeration. However, I recognize that certain portions of Scripture could be more valuable or less valuable, depending upon the context and need. Therefore I would understand 2 Tim 3:16 to mean that some portions of Scripture are profitable for teaching, some for refutation of error, some for correction of faults, and some for discipline in righteousness.

3. The third effect resulting from the act of inspiration is this: not one truth of Scripture can be set aside, nullified or omitted. This effect is found in John 10:34-36, which reads, "Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law, I said, you are gods?' If he called them gods to whom the word of God came, and the Scripture is not able to be set aside, are you saying to the one whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming!' because I said I am the Son of God?" This reference to the "law" is found, not in the first division of the Old Testament (the Torah), nor in the second division (the Prophets), but in the third division (the Writings), specifically in Psalm 82. The implication is that all of the Old Testament had the force of law, i.e., was binding upon the faith and obedience of the Israelite.

In Psalm 82 we find God judging the human judges of Israel who are perverting judgment. Because they are doing this, all of the fundamental structures of society are out of order. God commands these judges to judge righteous judgment; and He warns them that, although He has called them gods, yet they will die like men. The Psalmist calls upon God to intervene and judge the earth righteously.

Jesus uses this portion -- part of verse 6 -- to argue for the propriety of calling himself the Son of God. Properly understood, this is not a clever bit of sophistry on Jesus' part in an attempt to avoid the charge of blasphemy. It is rather a traditional argument, employing an appeal to incontrovertible authority. Jesus was simply saying, "If it is proper for God to call human judges 'gods' (because they stand in the place of God, judging in the name of God, and exercising the divine prerogative of life and death), is it not more proper that I, who really am God, should call myself the Son of God?" Thus Jesus uses Ps 82:6 to support the propriety of his own title, the Son of God; and in doing so, he lays down a principle which the Jews would not dare to controvert: the Scripture is not able to be set aside!

4. The fourth effect resulting from the act of inspiration may be stated as follows: in the act of its inscripturation, no portion of Scripture has been conditioned, as to its truth, by the fallibilities of its human author. This effect is found in 2 Pet 1:20, where we read: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture came into being by one's own interpretation." The reason why this does not happen is given in verse 21: "For not by the will of man came prophecy at any time, but being borne up by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God." This argument may be expressed as follows: "Because prophecy did not come by the will of man,
therefore no prophecy comes into being by one's own interpretation." Or, to put it another way, "Because men spoke from God as they were borne up by the Holy Spirit, therefore no prophecy comes into being by one's own interpretation."

I must confess that, as a young Christian, I was led to think that verse 20 meant that no one should place his own interpretation upon a Scripture verse or passage, but should seek the Holy Spirit's interpretation. In practice, this came to mean that I would accept the interpretation of some well-known Bible teacher or expositor. But I came to see that this verse speaks not of the reader's interpretation, but of the writer's interpretation. It tells us that no Scripture portion has been conditioned by the human author's interpretation. Thus, the infallible Word of God is not conditioned by the fallible words of men!

5. The fifth effect resulting from the act of inspiration is this: the truths of Scripture are more certain than the observations of empirical experience. This effect may be found in 2 Pet 1:16-19, where we read: "For we were not depending upon pseudo-intellectual myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but became witnesses of that one's majesty. For (he) was receiving from God the Father honor and glory, such a voice being borne to him from the Majestic Glory, `This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' And we heard this voice borne from heaven when we were with him in the holy mountain. And we have more certain the prophetic word, to which you do well to pay close attention, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts."

The "power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" in this context appears to refer to Christ's first coming, and to that specific event in our Lord's ministry when he was transfigured before Peter, James and John. Peter says that they did not build their accounts of Jesus on sophistical myths, but saw his majesty and heard the voice of God giving Jesus honor and glory. Yet, Peter says, the prophetic word is more certain, more firm, better established, more sure than even these observations based on empirical experience. Sense experience may deceive, the prophetic word will not; sense experience is of a private nature, the prophetic word is open, publicly available to Peter's readers; sense experience is in this case unique and unable to be repeated, the prophetic word records for all time this wonderful self-revelation of deity. To this prophetic word, Peter exhorts, they should pay close attention.

We have briefly noted what Scripture itself asserts are the elements included in the act of inspiration, as well as the effects resulting from the act of inspiration. These data would appear strongly to argue for the organic view of inspiration defined earlier. But now we must ask a further question.

WHAT IS THE RELEVANCE OF INSPIRATION TO THE APOGRAPHS?

This question prompts us to return to the implications of a statement made near the outset of our discussion. We said that inspiration, as a supernatural act of the Holy Spirit, refers to the sacred writings as originally penned, and says nothing about subsequent copies, versions or translations. But now we must ask, "Is this statement strictly true, in all senses?" That is, if we grant that inspiration is a unique act, referring only to the autographs, does this act have any implications for copies, versions and translations, i.e., implications for the apographs of Scripture which we presently possess?

The usual answer given by evangelical writers to this question (and it has been given times without number) is that, as a result of inspiration we can be sure that what we have is the Word of God, that it is true, and that it is authoritative. Some would add, "and that it is
infallible." The reason only some would add this clause is that the word "infallible" has been undergoing a development in meaning. To some Christians "infallible" means "without error." To others it has come to mean that "God's purposes in giving us Scripture will not fail to be secured." Those who take this latter meaning would view the apographs as infallible. They would employ a different term to mean "without error," namely the word "inerrant." All evangelicals would agree that the apographs are not inerrant. And all would agree that the apographs are infallible in the latter sense of the term.

But now we must ask, "How can apographs of Scripture be considered the Word of God, true, authoritative, and infallible (in the sense of being unable to fail to secure God's purpose), if those apographs are not inspired?" That is, if God has revealed himself inerrantly; and if He caused his revelation to be inerrantly inscripturated; and if these are the bases for our ability to say that the Scripture which God gave to us was the revealed, inspired Word of God written, and was true, authoritative, infallible and inerrant; then can we remove the factors of inspiration and inerrancy from the apographs and still retain the other important characteristics of Scripture in the Bibles which we presently possess and use? For example, is it possible for us as Christians to say, concerning the English Bibles which we have, "This is the Word of God?" Is it possible for Christian ministers to preach and teach the truth from an uninspired and errant apograph? And can we speak, on the basis of that kind of apograph, with the authority of God?

To illustrate this problem, permit me to quote from two evangelical writers. James M. Gray stated:

The record for whose inspiration we contend is the original record -- the autographs or parchments of Moses, David, Daniel, Matthew, Paul or Peter, as the case may be, and not any particular translation or translations of them whatever. There is no translation absolutely without error, or could there be, considering the infirmities of human copyists, unless God were pleased to perform a perpetual miracle to secure it.4

And Adolph Saphir stated:

I do not say that the Bible contains the Word of God. I say that the Bible is the Word of God. I think it is a most erroneous and dangerous thing to say that the Bible contains the Word of God. The Bible with its history, with its laws, with its poetry, with its maxims, with its biographies, with its epistles, with everything that is in it, is the Word of God.5

How, we may ask, can James M. Gray deny that the apographs are inspired or inerrant, and Adolph Saphir affirm that the apographs are, in their entirety, the Word of God? (That is, I am assuming that Saphir was referring to something he had -- the apographs -- and not to something which he did not have -- the autographs.)

A PROPOSED SOLUTION

Permit me to suggest a way out of this difficulty. I would propose a theological construct, the essence of which is this: that the term "inspired" include two subcategories inspiration as an act, and "inspiredness" as a quality. Inspiration would refer to the act of the Holy Spirit, operative only in the original inscripturation of revelation; "inspiredness" would refer to a unique quality, inherent in the autographs in a primary, immediate, absolute sense, but also retained in the apographs in a derived, secondary, mediate and relative sense. To put it another way, as a result of the act of inspiration, the quality of "inspiredness" would be found in the autographs absolutely and in the apographs relatively. Thus the term "inspiration"
would refer only to the originals, whereas the term "inspiredness" would refer both to the originals and to the copies of Scripture. The larger category "inspired" would then include both autographs and apographs, both the originals and copies of them.

This theological proposal (if it could be supported) would permit us to consider those copies, versions and translations which we possess to be the Word of God, true, authoritative, infallible and inspired (in the sense that they would be characterized by the quality of "inspiredness"). But can it be supported? Or is this only a theological curiosity, created by a feverish mind and nurtured by a strong psychological frame of desire?

The answer, interestingly, lies in the Scripture references at which we have already looked. Let us examine a few of them a bit further, and ask some pointed questions concerning them.

In 2 Tim 3:15 we discover that Timothy had known from childhood the Holy Scriptures which were able to give him the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. These were the Scriptures which, in verse 16, Paul says are God-breathed (or inspired) and profitable to adequately equip the man of God. Now when Paul spoke of the Holy Scriptures which Timothy had known from childhood, of which Scriptures was he speaking? If 2 Timothy was written in AD 63, and if (for argument's sake) Timothy was only 25 years old at the time, then Timothy would have been born in AD 38, eleven years before the first book of the New Testament Galatians was even written, in AD 49. Timothy had been raised in Judaism by a Jewish mother. The "Scriptures" on which he had been nourished were undoubtedly those of the Old Testament. Now we must pointedly ask, "What Scriptures of the Old Testament did Timothy's mother and grandmother have in their synagogue (or perhaps, if they were very fortunate, in their possession) the originals or copies?" The overwhelming probability is that they were copies apographs. Yet Paul says that these apographs are able to give the knowledge of salvation (verse 15); and he goes on to say that all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable. It would not make a great deal of sense for Paul to have said that the Scriptures which Timothy did not have -- the autographs -- were God-breathed and profitable to equip him for every good work. I believe that Paul was saying that the Scriptures which Timothy did have were God-breathed and profitable to equip him for every good work. That is, I believe that the copies of the Old Testament books available to Timothy in AD 43 (when he was, say, five years old), and the copies of those New Testament books which had thus far been written, put into circulation, and made available to Timothy in AD 63 in other words, whatever books could properly be called Scripture were inspired, in the sense that they carried in them the quality of "inspiredness."

In John 10:35, Jesus referred to Psalm 82, argued for the propriety of calling himself the Son of God on its basis, and said "the Scripture is not able to be set aside." Now if not one truth of Scripture can be set aside, nullified or omitted, to what Scripture was Jesus referring? To the autograph of Psalm 82? Or to the copies which the Jews had in the temple and in their synagogues, whose words they could check and read for themselves? Most probably the apographs. Incidentally, this text would argue not only for the "inspiredness" (and thus the truth and divine authority) of copies, but would also argue for the uncorrupted preservation, in the apographs, of the truths of the autographs, in spite of errors of transmission.

In 2 Pet 1:19 Peter says that "we have more certain the prophetic word." I believe that Peter was referring to the Old Testament Scriptures, which predicted the first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet the prophetic word which Peter had was not the originals, but copies. However, in verses 20 and 21 Peter is referring to the manner in which the prophecy of Scripture originally came into being; and I believe he is there speaking of the autographs, not of copies. And yet both are inspired. The autographs had the quality of "inspiredness" because of
the Holy Spirit’s unique act of inspiration; the copies had the quality of “inspiredness” because they were derived from the autographs. In spite of the fact that the inscripturated revelation was transmitted across centuries, copied, translated, and marred by copyists’ errors, its truths were preserved in such a way that Peter could tell his readers to pay the closest attention to that prophetic word which was available to them.

**IMPLICATIONS OF THIS PROPOSAL**

It is well to consider carefully the implications of a proposal before hurrying to adopt it. In connection with this proposal I would suggest two implications.

The most obvious is that the term "inspiration" represents an absolute concept, whereas "inspiredness" represents a relative concept. To the degree that copies, versions, translations and paraphrases diverge from the text of the autographs, to that degree is "inspiredness" diminished. Someone will say, "But we do not have the text of the autographs." This valid objection establishes a warrant for the exacting task of textual (or lower) criticism, in which we attempt to discern which words of Scripture are attested by the best textual evidence. Having undertaken this task (which must be renewed from time to time), the question may then be asked, "Can apographs move so far for the best attested text that they no longer retain the quality of `inspiredness'?" This could happen, particularly at specific points where apographs have deliberately emended the text, or have selected a dubious reading in order to support a theological bias. However, unless the apograph as a whole has corrupted the content of the best attested text so badly that the text is no longer recognizable, some degree of "inspiredness" would probably remain in the apograph. Nevertheless, a distinction would need to be made between an essentially trustworthy copy of Scripture, and an essentially untrustworthy one; the difference being that an essentially trustworthy copy would be one which, with confidence, one could commend almost indiscriminately; and an essentially untrustworthy copy would be one which one could not commend at all, or about which one would have great reservations.

A second implication of this proposal is that we can have not only a tremendous confidence in the fact that we possess copies of Scripture which are as provably close in accuracy to the originals as those copies of the Old Testament which the apostles had; but that we can also be assured that what we have is the inspired, true, authoritative, infallible, trustworthy, and powerful Word of the living God! May the divine Author of Scripture himself fill us with this confidence and this assurance!

**PART TWO: INSPIRATION, "INSPIREDNESS" AND THE PROCLAMATION OF GOD'S WORD TODAY: A MODEST SECOND STEP**

**THE PROBLEM ILLUSTRATED**

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.
It seems eminently fitting that the apostle Paul, having written these tremendous words concerning the inspiration and profitableness of Scripture, should go right on to write:

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.

2 Tim 4:1-4

Here Paul charges Timothy to preach the word, to preach sound doctrine, and to preach the truth. The connection between the last two verses of chapter 3, and the first four verses of chapter 4, seems unavoidable: because all Scripture is inspired and profitable, therefore preach the word!

Of course it should be recognized that the Scripture which Timothy had in AD 63 (at the time of writing of 2 Timothy) included copies of the Old Testament books, copies of those New Testament books which had thus far been written, put into circulation, and made available to Timothy, and perhaps the original of Paul's first epistle to Timothy, together with the original of this second epistle. It should also be recognized that the claim of inerrancy is not made for copies of Scripture, but for the originals.

This distinction between inerrant originals and errant copies has occasioned considerable discussion, both concerning the value of the doctrine of inerrancy (since we do not possess the originals), and concerning our ability to say that we are proclaiming the word, sound doctrine and truth today (since we possess only errant copies). This discussion, which has been going on for some time, has acquired a new impetus and urgency in recent years, in part because of the cleavage which has surfaced between "inerrantists" and "errantists" in the evangelical camp.

An illustration of this discussion appears in the exchange, in editorials and letters, between Dr. Lester De Koster, editor of The Banner, and Dr. Edwin H. Palmer, late Executive Secretary of the New International Version Translation Committee. The exchange was occasioned by Dr. Palmer's statement in the January 1977 issue of The Outlook, as follows: "To be very clear, let me assert with all the force that is in me that the King James Version that Dr. De Koster has on his table is not the infallible, inerrant Word of God. And no translation of the Bible is without error -- not even the best of them all, the New International Version! All translations without exception have errors in them." Dr. Palmer wrote these words in an article defending Harold Lindsell's Battle for the Bible against criticisms by Dr. De Koster.) Dr. De Koster subsequently sent a letter to the editor of The Outlook which appears in the June 1977 issue, together with Dr. Palmer's reply. Dr. De Koster asked four questions, and Dr. Palmer addressed three of them. Permit me to quote the exchange:

1. "Can Dr. Palmer be serious?"
   Answer: "Yes, I am. I will say again what I believe: the Bible which Dr. De Koster has on his table is not, I repeat, not the infallible, inerrant Word of God. And it is most important to realize this. Yes, I am serious."

2. "Does the Christian Reformed Church base its synodical decisions, sermonizing, consistorial decisions, and Christian life on an errant and fallible Bible?"
Answer: "No, it does not. It bases them on the inerrant, infallible Word of God – the originals. It has always distinguished between the autographa and the apographa, between the original writings that the Holy Spirit inspired and the countless copies and translations that are based on the original. . . . Only what was written by men inspired by the Holy Spirit is infallible. Only what Jeremiah, David, Paul and Peter actually wrote is inspired."

3. "When the Belgic Confession characterizes Scripture as `this infallible rule' (Art. VII) does it really mean, that infallible original now lost?"
Answer: "Yes. It cannot be the King James that added to the original and now says `nephews' when `grandchildren' are meant (1 Tim 5:4)."

Dr. De Koster reported and commented on this exchange in the August 19, 1977 issue of The Banner in an editorial entitled "Really Incredible?" In the August 26 issue he set Dr. Lindsell in opposition to Dr. Palmer by several quotations from The Battle for the Bible. On page 36 Dr. Lindsell states: "Any student of lower criticism admits there have been copyist's mistakes, but a copyist's mistake is something entirely different from an error in Scripture. A misspelled or a misplaced word is a far cry from error, by which is meant a misstatement or something that is contrary to fact." And on page 37 Dr. Lindsell adds: "Textual problems today in no way make the doctrine of biblical inerrancy impossible." In the September 2, 1977 issue of The Banner Dr. De Koster addressed an Open Letter to the Reformed Fellowship (the publishers of The Outlook), applying Dr. Palmer's view to the task of preaching. He wrote:

I set this open question to you, Brethren, in the context of Preaching. For the doctrine of Scripture is tested by the doctrine of Preaching.

Is Preaching Possible?

Only, if the Bible open on the pulpit is the Word of God, and thus inspired, infallible, inerrant. Yes, there are only two choices: either, (1) the Bible on our pulpits, and elsewhere, is the inspired Word of God, or (2) it is the uninspired word of man.

If you deny the first choice, as The Outlook does, then you are stuck with the second. But the second choice makes true Preaching impossible as the tragic history of Liberalism so clearly demonstrates.

The Church, as we believe it, stands or falls with true Preaching. And true Preaching stands or falls with the belief that an inspired Bible lies open on the pulpit. How else shall the Word go forth:

Thus saith the Lord! . . .

Meanwhile, Brethren, The Outlook is your magazine. Does it here speak for you?

Listen to it further, as you make up your mind: "For all practical purposes, we can take a modern translation in hand even the King James with all its errors and say, `This is the Word of God.' It is not the Word of God, because it is not the original, which the Holy Spirit inspired . . ." (a quote from Dr. Palmer's article in the January 1977 issue of The Outlook).

Look for a moment at the Bible, in your hand or on the pulpit, and see if your lips can frame your Outlook's words: "It is not the Word of God . . ." For then it is only the word of man!

Is that now your doctrine of Scripture? . . .
Briefly, *The Outlook’s* scenario runs like this: God once inspired the original writers of the Bible. He preserved them from all error as they committed His inspired (God-breathed) Word to writing. But, alas, those original manuscripts called the autographs, or autographa) were lost, or worn out, or destroyed in the course of time. But what happened, then, to that inspired Word? *The Outlook* says that this Word went with the autographs; God’s Word was lost as if God’s intent to preserve His inspired Word for His Church in all ages was thus easily frustrated! The inspired Word of God, according to *The Outlook*, no longer exists. History has devoured it! . . . Obviously, on this view, the world has been without any inspired Word from the Lord ever since the first copies were made, and originals lost. . . . But what good, then, for *The Outlook* to assure us that "we" (whoever that is) are now sure of the accuracy of "98 percent" of our copies? What good would it do if "we" were certain of 100 percent accuracy -- so long as the "God-breathed" Word upon which Preaching depends was lost in the first copy? "We" might say that the Bible on our pulpits is as pure a copy as Ivory soap -- it remains, on *The Outlook’s* grounds, still the uninspired, fallible, errant word of copyists and translators. No basis, Brethren, for: "Thus saith the Lord!"

Of course, it should be pointed out in the interests of objectivity that, in the midst of all the dust thrown into the air at Palmer and Lindsell’s expense, De Koster never attempts an alternative explanation for his position that the Bible on the table and on the pulpit of his church "is, here and now, the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God." Instead he retreats into mysticism. He speaks of "God’s mysterious ability to use a fallible, frail, erring human ministry to proclaim His infallible Word!" and then goes on to say:

No one, at least in the Reformed tradition, claims inerrancy, or infallibility, or inspiration for the pulpit ministry. Yet, genuine Preaching is possible, and can mark off the true Church, only because the Word of God is, in fact, here and now, conveyed to the faithful by the lips of sinful man! You know this well, Brethren. Many of you depend upon this inexplicable mystery every Lord’s Day to dare to say: "Thus saith the Lord!" . . .

No, this cannot be explained. Only believed -- or disbelieved. How can God convey His inspired Word across time and space by way of fallible human beings? This is, for us, an inexplicable mystery. But we are naive enough to believe (except for *The Outlook*) that God in His overarching Providence does get His inspired, infallible, inerrant Scriptures from its writers to our pulpits, and, from our pulpits to the faithful in the pew. This is what Reformed believers gladly affirm, knowing full well, Brethren, that if you and I never believe more than we can explain, we will never believe unto salvation!

Aside from the rhetoric, let us analyze what Dr. De Koster is saying. First, he affirms that God uses sinful human ministers to proclaim the Word of God. With this affirmation we can humbly and joyfully acquiesce. Second, he affirms that God conveys His Word across time and
space, from the writers of Scripture to present-day ministers and their people. To this affirmation practically all evangelicals can agree. Third, Dr. De Koster asserts that the way in which God gets His Word from the writers of Scripture to us today is "mysterious," an "inexplicable mystery," something which "we are naive enough to believe," and something which we "gladly affirm" but which "cannot be explained." To this assertion we obliged to respond in a twofold manner. On the one hand, it is good and proper to acknowledge that sinful human beings cannot exhaustively understand the nature or the working of God. Truly, as the Lord says, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa 55:9). On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of evangelical writers (including Lindsell and Palmer) have attempted to come to grips with the necessity of clearly distinguishing between the original manuscripts of Scripture, which were the products of the Holy Spirit's special and unique act of inspiration, were inerrant, and were infallible (in the dictionary sense of that term), and the present-day copies of Scripture, which were not copied by inspiration, and which are products of a long process of transmission which involved a number of copyist's errors; and have attempted responsibly to deal with the problems raised by this necessary distinction, especially by demonstrating how closely present-day copies of Scripture approximate the text of the original manuscripts. By so doing, these evangelicals have attempted to preserve the integrity of the assertion that we have the Word of God today, as well as the teaching of Scripture concerning its unique inspiration. Dr. De Koster sees no need for making such a distinction or of coming to grips with the problems raised by it. He chooses simply to believe that we have God's "inspired, infallible, inerrant Scriptures" on our pulpits today. Such fideism is fascinating; like a magic wand it waves into nonexistence both the problem of errors in transmission and the need for textual criticism! Fourth, Dr. De Koster affirms that the Bibles which lie on our pulpits are inspired, infallible, and inerrant; then he denies inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy for the pulpit ministry; and then he affirms that God gets His inspired, infallible, inerrant Scriptures to the faithful in the pew. If this combination of statements seems mind-boggling, it should be remembered that to Dr. De Koster it is an "inexplicable mystery" which he is "naive enough to believe." Frankly, such a confession of belief seems more than faintly reminiscent of Tertullian's "I believe it because it is incredible," or Kierkegaard's "I believe it because it is absurd!"

Although this exchange between Dr. Lester De Koster and Dr. Edwin H. Palmer does not serve particularly to illuminate the discussion concerning the value of the doctrine of inerrancy (since we do not possess the originals) and concerning our ability to say that we are proclaiming the word, sound doctrine, and truth today (since we possess only errant copies), yet it serves to illustrate the kinds of tensions occasioned by the distinction between inerrant originals and errant copies. To these tensions we must now address ourselves.

THE CONCEPT OF "INSPIREDNESS"

In a paper first presented at the 1977 Summer Theological Institute of Biblical Theological Seminary (Part One, above), I proposed a concept for which I coined the term "inspiredness." Under the general term "inspired," I included two terms which are more specific: "inspiration" and "inspiredness." "Inspiration" was defined as:

... that special act of the Holy Spirit by which He guided the writers of the books of sacred Scripture, so that their words should convey the thoughts He wished conveyed, should bear a proper relationship to the thoughts of the other books of Scripture, and should be kept free from error in thought, fact, doctrine, and judgment.
In brief, inspiration is the supernatural act of the Holy Spirit by which God's Word was inscripturated.

"Inspiredness" was defined as

... a unique quality, inherent in the autographs in a primary, immediate, absolute sense, but also retained in the apographs in a derived, secondary, mediate, and relative sense.

In brief, "inspiredness" is a quality resulting from the act of inspiration.

Inspiration refers only to the autographs of Scripture; "inspiredness" refers both to the autographs and to the apographs of Scripture. Thus under the general term "inspired" I included both the originals and the copies of Scripture. The originals are inspired in two senses: they were the product of an act of inspiration; and they were marked by the quality of "inspiredness." The copies were (and are) inspired in only one sense: they were (and are) marked by the quality of "inspiredness."

This theological proposal, if it could be supported, would provide us with a basis for the claim that the copies, versions and translations which we have in our possession are in truth the inspired and authoritative Word of God (inspired in the sense that they would be characterized by the quality of "inspiredness").

In Part One, pages 9-11, I indicated scriptural grounding for my proposal in 2 Tim 3:15, John 10:35 and 2 Pet 1:19. I do not believe that it is exegetically defensible to interpret 2 Tim 3:16 as saying, "All Scripture was inspired, and is profitable . . ." Because it is not exegetically defensible to interpret it in this fashion, I do not believe it is theologically sound to understand the first predicate adjective "inspired" to refer to the unique act of inspiration in the past, and the second predicate adjective "profitable" to refer to a constant quality characteristic of Scripture in the present. Rather, I believe that Paul is saying that all Scripture both originals and all copies is characterized by the constant qualities of "inspiredness" and "profitableness." And that includes the copies which the Jews of Christ's day had, the copies which Paul and Timothy had, and the copies which lie upon our pulpits today!

THE POSSIBILITY OF ERROR IN THE STEPS OF TRANSMISSION

However, at this point we must make an important qualification. "Inspiredness," though it is a product of inspiration, does not require the quality of inerrancy. Inerrancy is a quality which is a product of inspiration, not of "inspiredness." This raises the question, "If inerrancy is a quality distinct from `inspiredness,' and if the quality of `inspired

The problem of how much error the quality of "inspiredness" can accommodate could be dealt with summarily, simply by negating the applicability of the term "Word of God" to the copies of Scripture in our possession. This would amount to a frank (if a bit precipitous) admission that one of two possibilities is true: either that any degree of error makes the term "Word of God" inapplicable to our copies, or that so much error has piled up over centuries of repetitious copying that the Word of God has become hopelessly irretrievable in the tangled mesh of truth and error. The first possibility (that any degree of error makes the term inapplicable) is plainly negated by the fact that Christ, Paul and Peter all speak of errant copies in terms of "Word of God." The second possibility (that so much accumulated error makes the term inapplicable to present-day copies) must be examined to see just how much error has entered the process of transmission of the Word of God from its original state as given by God to its present state as received by us. To that task we now turn our attention.
STEP ONE: REVELATION

The first step in the transmission of God's Word is that of revelation itself. Here we must ask the question, "Can God reveal Himself truly?" By revelation (here in the special sense, as distinguished from general revelation in nature) we mean "divine self-disclosure in immediate mode." But what do we mean by "truly"? A long time ago Aristotle said, "To say what is, is, and what is not, is not, is true. And to say what is, is not, and what is not, is, is false." More recently the semantic theory of truth proposed by the Polish logician Tarski has been widely adopted in linguistic and philosophical circles. Tarski said that the statement "Snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white. That is, the words in the sentence are a linguistic entity, and the analogous words refer to reality. The characteristics of Tarski's definition are (1) truth is defined in terms of language; (2) truth is defined in terms of sentences (that is, truth is a property of sentences, not individual words); and (3) truth is defined in terms of correspondence. In the light of these definitions we must ask, "Can God reveal truth concerning himself? Can He reveal to us something of what He actually is?" Can He bridge the great chasm between an infinite, holy God and finite, sinful men? Gordon Clark, writing an article in Revelation and the Bible, says:

... the evangelical Christian ... by reason of the doctrine of creation, must maintain that language is adequate for all religious and theological expression ... . The possibility of rational communication between God and man is easily explained on theistic presuppositions. If God created man in his own rational image and endowed him with the power of speech, then a purpose of language, in fact, the chief purpose of language, would naturally be the revelation of truth to man ...6

Paul K. Jewett, in the same volume, speaks of the

... uniqueness of the Biblical idea of revelation, which is that history is the medium through which the eternal God has revealed himself once for all. The foundation is laid in the Old Testament concept of the history of Israel ... But the Old Testament idea of history, as the scene of God's acts as Redeemer of his people, is not an end in itself. Its meaning is Jesus Christ, whose name is Emmanuel, God-with-us, who came to "fulfill the law and the prophets." The prophets had the Word of God, but Jesus is the Word. "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The incarnation is that event in history which gathers up all other revelation into itself.7

To the question, "Can God reveal truth concerning himself?" we must answer: "Not only is there the possibility of such revelation, there is the actuality!" As the writer of Hebrews puts it, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers by the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us by His Son" (Heb 1:1-2).

However, there are those who would claim, "Yes, God can reveal truth concerning himself, but what He has revealed in not inerrant, but only generally trustworthy." In this manner we must understand the concept of "general trustworthiness" as implying that God's revelation includes error. This answer calls for analysis.

If God revealed error, then either He must have done so deliberately or He could not help doing so. If He deliberately revealed error, we must ask, "Why would, and how could, the God of truth reveal error to man?" Scripture itself tells us that "God is not a man, that He should lie"
(Num 23:19), and that God "cannot lie" (Tit 1:2). There is no hint of such error in the teachings of the prophets, of Christ, or of the apostles. And there is no evidence that there were errors in revelation itself, either as originally communicated or as originally inscriptured. There is abundant evidence of errors of transcription; but what evidence is there of errors of revelation, especially since neither side of the question possesses the original manuscripts of Scripture! Thus we must reject the concept that God deliberately revealed error, on two counts: (1) it is antithetical to His nature; and (2) there is no evidence to substantiate it.

If, on the other hand, God could not help revealing error, then either He is not omniscient (i.e., He was ignorant of the fact that He was revealing error), or He is not omnipotent (i.e., He simply could not inerrantly communicate His thoughts and words to men). That God is omniscient is so clearly taught in Scripture that we must reject the first alternative. To the alternative claim that God is not able inerrantly to communicate His thoughts to man, we must ask, "What man is that who dares to presume to say what God can and cannot do, apart from revelation?" It is clear in Scripture that there are some things which God cannot do, but His revelation of truth to man is never mentioned as one of them! In fact, one of the things which God is said not to be able to do is specifically related to this claim "God cannot lie" (Tit 1:2). Thus we must reject this alternative. If God, who created man's mind, can communicate one truth to man, then in principle there is no reason why He cannot communicate any finite number of truths to man.

And it will not do to ask, "But what does man really need for the knowledge of salvation?" and answer, "Not an inerrant, but only an essentially trustworthy revelation." We do not decide the nature of what God revealed by the measure of what man needs; but rather by the measure of what God purposed to do, and did, in His revelation to man. And there is no other source of knowledge as to what God purposed to do, than the statements of Scripture themselves! The norm of the content of revelation must be the content of the inscripturated revelation. There is no other objective norm!

**STEP TWO: INSCRIPTURATION**

The second step in the transmission of God's Word is that of the inscripturation of revelation. Here we must ask the question, "Has God caused His revelation to be truly inscripturated?" To this question we must reply that either revelation has been truly (i.e., inerrantly, for truth by definition must exclude error) inscripturated, or human finiteness and fallibility have conditioned (at least to some degree) the inscripturation of revelation. If the latter is true, then either we need an absolute principle external to Scripture in order to distinguish divine truth from human error; or, lacking such a principle, we cannot know what is true and what is false, and thus cannot help being reduced to agnosticism or skepticism with regard to any absolute truth in Scripture.

If the kerygma (the message, or proclamation) of Christ be claimed as the absolute principle by which truth can be distinguished from error, then it should be pointed out that by definition the kerygma itself is conditioned as to its inscripturation by human finiteness and fallibility. Thus the kerygma cannot escape the possibility of error, and therefore cannot be the norm of absolute truth.

If empirical verification be proposed as the absolute principle of distinguishing truth from error, then what of those statements in Scripture which have not as yet been empirically verified? Must each one await the judgment of philosophy, science or history before it can be affirmed as true? If so, what does this do to faith? You can only trust in that which you believe to be true. You can never trust that which you believe is in error or is a lie, no matter how hard
you may try! (Thus faith and truth are bound up together, in the sense that faith is dependent on truth.) If one must await the conclusion of critical (and for the most part, unbelieving) scholarship before he can know whether or not a particular statement is true, then he cannot believe that statement until such conclusions are reached. But if and when these expert human conclusions are made, is one then sure that he has absolute truth? And what about those spiritual realities which are not able to be verified by sense experience, at least in this present existence? Can one believe in them? As the Lord Jesus put it, "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (John 3:12). Empirical verification as a method of testing and verifying truth-claims via sense experience is hopelessly inadequate as an absolute criterion of distinguishing truth from error in Scripture!

This consideration prompts a necessary review of the basis approach and method in discovering the true doctrine of inspiration. If we approach this question via the "critical data of Scripture" or via the "phenomena of Scripture," it would appear unlikely that we could ever arrive at any confidence concerning the Bible as the Word of God. If on the other hand we approach this question via the witness of Scripture to itself, we discover that with one voice the prophets, Christ and the apostles proclaim that God's revelation of truth has been truly inscripturated! The teaching of Scripture concerning its own inspiration must be permitted to speak. What God has said concerning the nature and extent of the inscripturation of revelation must be taken as normative in defining the true doctrine of inspiration. Only when we are armed with this doctrine are we equipped to undertake the task of attempting to resolve the problems presented by the "critical data of Scripture."

**STEP THREE: PRESERVATION**

The third step in the transmission of God's Word is that of its preservation through the process of copying. Here we must ask the question, "Has God caused His inscripturated revelation to be purely preserved?" To this question we must give a mixed answer. If by "purely preserved" one means "inerrantly preserved," then answer is no. But if by "purely preserved" one means "uncorruptedly preserved" in the sense that no teaching of Scripture (either in whole or in part) has been corrupted, then the answer is yes.

For example, in the more than 600 manuscripts of the Hebrew Old Testament there are about 284 million letters. Among these 600 plus manuscripts there are about 900 thousand variations in the text. At first blush 900 thousand variations certainly seem to indicate that the text has become hopelessly corrupt! However, of these 900 thousand variations, 750 thousand are the negligible variations between the similar-appearing Hebrew letters \( \text{waw} \) and \( \text{yodh} \). The remaining 150 thousand do not affect any part of the system of doctrine discoverable in Scripture nor any individual teaching of the Bible as a whole. It should be pointed out that 900 thousand variations sounds like a great many, but 900 thousand variations distributed among 284 million letters amounts to one variation in 316 letters. And if the 750 thousand negligible variations between \( \text{waw} \) and \( \text{yodh} \) are discounted, the 150 thousand variations distributed among 284 million letters amounts to one variation in 1893 letters. Think of that level of accuracy for an ancient text, parts of which are anywhere from 2400 to almost 3400 years old! By way of comparison, this amounts to the misspelling of one letter in about a half-page of this paper!

John H. Skilton, in whose article some of these statistics are to be found, makes a statement which neatly summarizes this point. He writes:

> We will grant that God's care and providence, singular thought they have been, have not preserved for us any of the original
manuscripts either of the Old Testament or of the New Testament. We will furthermore grant that God did not keep from error those who copied the Scripture during the long period in which the sacred text was transmitted in copies written by hand. But we must maintain that the God who gave the Scriptures, who works all things after the counsel of his will, has exercised a remarkable care over his Word, has preserved it in all ages in a state of substantial purity, and has enabled it to accomplish the purpose for which he gave it. It is inconceivable that the sovereign God who was pleased to give his Word as a vital and necessary instrument in the salvation of his people would permit his Word to become completely marred in its transmission and unable to accomplish its ordained end. Rather, as surely as that he is God, we would expect to find him exercising a singular care in the preservation of his written revelation.

That God has preserved the Scriptures in such a condition of essential purity as we would expect is manifestly the case.8

STEP FOUR: ESTABLISHING THE BEST TEXT

The fourth step in the transmission of God’s Word is that of the construction, via textual criticism, of an original-language text which most closely approximates that of the original manuscripts. Here we must ask the question, "Is it possible, via textual criticism, to arrive at a text about which, in a probability sense, we can be morally certain regarding its accurate representation of the autographs?" To this question we may confidently reply that we have such a text in our possession. Our confidence of this lies in the agreement of the many manuscripts of the New Testament, together with the connecting link of the early church fathers with the New Testament writers; and the agreement of various lines of witness to the Old Testament text, together with the connecting link of the Jews (to whom was entrusted the keeping and transmission of the Old Testament writings) with the Old Testament writers.

We have already noted some statistics concerning the Old Testament; now let us note some concerning the New. We have about five thousand manuscripts of the Greek New Testament (either the whole New Testament or portions of it). These include approximately: (1) 80 papyrus manuscripts, dating as far back as the second century; (2) 260 parchment manuscripts (uncials), dating as far back as the third century; (3) 2700 cursive manuscripts, dating from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries; (4) 2100 lectionaries, containing selections from the New Testament for use in church services; and (5) a number of ostraca and amulets. In addition to these Greek manuscripts, we have many manuscripts of ancient versions; those of the Latin Vulgate alone exceed eight thousand. Besides manuscript evidence, we have the important connecting link of the early church fathers, a number of whom included citations of the New Testament in their writings. Let us note six of these writers, the first five of whom died before AD 255, and the sixth died in AD 340. The number of citations of the New Testament included in each of their writings is as follows: (1) Irenaeus, 1819; (2) Clement of Alexandria, 2406; (3) Origen, 17,922; (4) Tertullian, 7258; (5) Hippolytus, 1378; and (6) Eusebius, 5176.

In this great mass of evidence for the text of the New Testament there is also a large number of variations, as was the case for the Old Testament. In regard to these, Benjamin B. Warfield, in his Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament, calls attention to Ezra Abbott’s view that 19/20ths of the variations in the New Testament text “have so little support that, although they are various readings, no one would think of them as rival readings; and nineteen-twentieths of the remainder are of so little importance that their adoption or rejection would cause no appreciable difference in the sense of the passages where they
occur."9 Warfield goes on to state that "the great mass of the New Testament ... has been transmitted to us with no, or next to no, variation; and even in the most corrupt form in which it has ever appeared, to use the oft-quoted words of Richard Bentley, "the real text of the sacred writers is competently exact; . . . nor is one article of faith or moral precept either perverted or lost . . . choose as awkwardly as you will, choose the worst by design, out of the whole lump of readings"10

It should be noted, in connection with the matter of textual criticism, that the great question which liberal scholars raise is not that of whether the text which we have accurately represents the autographs, but rather that of the value of the autographs themselves! For them the autographs are not the Word of God, but the word of man; and amazingly accurate copies of the word of man do not overly excite them! Their problem appears to lie in their doctrine of revelation itself; and behind that problem stands the even greater problem of their doctrine of the nature of God.

STEP FIVE: TRANSLATION

The fifth step in the transmission of God's Word is that of the translation of the best attested texts of the Old and New Testaments into the native or common language of every nation to which the Scriptures come. Here we must ask the question, "Can the best attested text of Scripture be translated with such accuracy that we can confidently call the resultant version "The Word of God"?" To this question we must respond by pointing out two facts. First, in a number of places the New Testament writers appear to quote from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. They quote it as Scripture and as carrying with it all the authority of the Word of God. Second, we have a number of translations in our possession, some of which are more accurate and some less accurate, but all of which are the Word of God and all of which are characterized by the quality of "inspiredness." At the present time the three leading contenders for the title of the English "Textus Receptus" are the King James or Authorized Version, the New American Standard Bible, and the New International Version. Of course, I am speaking of favored versions among evangelicals, not among liberals, Roman Catholics, Jews or cultists; and I am speaking only of English-language versions. There are many other English versions, including the Revised Standard Version, the New English Bible, the Living Bible, Today's English Version (or the Good News Bible), J. B. Phillips' translation, the Jerusalem Bible, and a host of others, including Douay, Goodspeed, Moffatt, and the Confraternity Edition. To some degree, all of these versions retain the quality of "inspiredness." Nevertheless I believe that a distinction should be made between essentially trustworthy translations and those which are essentially untrustworthy; the difference being that an essentially trustworthy translation is one which, with confidence, one could commend almost indiscriminately, whereas an essentially untrustworthy translation is one which one could not commend with confidence, or about which one would have strong reservations. Of course, the saving feature about this step is that there are many Christians who have a working proficiency in the original languages of Scripture, who can check the accuracy of any or all of these translations, and can perhaps even more closely approximate the meaning of the best attested text of Scripture.

STEP SIX: INTERPRETATION

The sixth step in the transmission of God's Word is that of the interpretation of Scripture. Here we ask the question, "Can we approximate the God-intended meaning of Scripture sufficiently to be able to affirm that our understanding of the Word of God is correct?" If the answer to this question is no, then transmission has failed, and all the previous steps are futile. If we cannot have correct understanding of the Word of God, then salvation itself becomes impossible,
because saving faith involves knowledge of, assent to, and trust in the redemptive truths of Christ's incarnation, atonement and resurrection. Because believers have been born again by the Spirit of God, they can understand the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:14-15). Because believers have the anointing (the gift of spiritual enlightenment or understanding) of the indwelling Holy Spirit, they are able to perceive and discern truth (1 John 2:20-21,27). The Holy Spirit is both the infallible Author of Scripture and the infallible Interpreter of Scripture; and therefore believers can have a correct understanding of the Word of God.

Having said this, however, we recognize that among professing Christians there are presuppositionalists and evidentialists, young-earth creationists and old-earth creationists, dichotomists and trichotomists, Calvinists and Arminians, Baptists and paedobaptists, dispensationalists and covenant theology adherents, amillennialists, postmillennialists and premillennialists, pretribulationalists and posttribulationalists. In fact, there are even inerrantists and errantists! How can we reconcile these differences of interpretation with the claim that it is possible to have a correct understanding of the Word of God? Shall we say that all of these interpretations are correct, and that all of them are informed by the infallible Interpreter of Scripture, the Holy Spirit?

I believe that the disparity can at least partly be explained by the recognition of four factors: (1) the continuing effects of sin upon even the regenerate human understanding; (2) the differences in the systems of hermeneutics devised by biblical scholars; (3) the frequent gaps between good theory and bad practice; and (4) the frequent failure to distinguish essentials from nonessentials, or verities from distinctives.

In the midst of all these differences of interpretation, three facts should give us hope. First, our understandings, our hermeneutics, our practice and our emphases are, by God's grace, always remediable, always open to correction and modification. Second, all born-again Christians have more in common than they have in difference; they have a greater unity than they have diversity; there is more that should unite them than divide them. Third (quoting the words of the Westminster Confession, chap I, sect VII):

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; 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.

STEP SEVEN: PROCLAMATION

The seventh step in the transmission of God's Word is that of the proclamation of God's Word. Here we ask the question, "When, by means of exposition, illustration, application and persuasion, we attempt to preach upon or teach a portion of Scripture, can we properly say that we are preaching or teaching the Word of God?" In Acts 4:30 we find thousands of believers gathered together, and we are told that "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the Word of God with boldness." In Acts 8:4 we are told concerning the scattered disciples of the church in Jerusalem, "Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word." And in 2 Tim 4:2 Paul exhorts his son in the faith to "preach the word!" On the basis of many such Scriptures I believe it is quite proper to speak of preaching and teaching the Word of God. Of course, this is only true as we approximate the content and intended meaning of Scripture, and if the Scripture which we have can properly be called the Word of God. This brings us back to the concept of "inspiredness."
CONCLUSIONS

Earlier in this paper we noted that Paul writes, "All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable." We pointed out that it is not exegetically defensible to translate this statement, "All Scripture was God-breathed." Still the objection may be made, "Even though we cannot put 'was' with the first predicate adjective and 'is' with the second, is there not inherent in the word 'God-breathed' the idea of origination? Is not Paul saying that Scripture has come from God's mouth, and therefore is the Word of God? And does this not speak of the inspiration of the original writings of Scripture by the special act of the Holy Spirit?"

To this objection two things need to be said. First, it is true that the term "God-breathed" has primary reference to the original inspiration of Scripture. God breathed out His Word as holy men of God wrote; and the result was Scripture, the Word of God written. Second, it is also true that the term "God-breathed" has secondary reference to all copies, versions, and translations which may properly be called "Scripture." "All Scripture is God-breathed." This includes the copies of Scripture which Timothy had known from childhood and the copies which were available to Timothy at the time Paul wrote 2 Timothy. Paul did not say to Timothy, "Some Scripture is God-breathed (namely the original manuscripts which Timothy did not have); but rather he said, "All Scripture is God-breathed (including the copies which Timothy had)." This "God-breathed" characteristic of Scripture was not lost with the loss or destruction of the original manuscripts, but was retained in the copies.

These considerations now permit us to attempt a fuller definition of the concept of "inspiredness." "Inspiredness" is that supernatural, Word-bearing, Word-expressing, Word-retaining quality which guarantees that Scripture, subsequent to its inspiration, is a revelation from and of God. This quality is a product of inspiration, and characterizes not only the text of the original manuscripts of Scripture, but also the texts of all copies of Scripture, to the extent and degree that the texts of those copies faithfully reproduce the text of the originals.

What is the implication of "inspiredness" for the proclamation of God's Word today? Simply this: to the extent and degree that the copies which we have can be called Scripture, to that extent and degree we have the quality of "inspiredness." "All Scripture is inspired by God . . ." And to the extent and degree to which we have the quality of "inspiredness," to that extent and degree we have the Word of God.

Let us then take heart, realizing the remarkable providence which God has exercised in the preservation and care of His Word, and let us proclaim this living and abiding Word of God with all confidence, in the power of its divine Author, the Holy Spirit, and to the everlasting honor and glory of the incarnate Word, the Lord Jesus Christ!

REFERENCES

3. Ibid., p 141.


