

The Sufficiency of Scripture  
in Expository Preaching  
STEVEN J. LAWSON

Just How High Was Jesus'  
View of Scripture?  
JOHN MACARTHUR

The Classical Defense  
of Scripture  
R. C. SPROUL

# EXPOSITOR

A PUBLICATION OF ONEPASSION MINISTRIES

## Biblical Inerrancy AND THE Prophetic Word

### INAUGURAL ISSUE

JOHN MACARTHUR  
R. C. SPROUL  
STEVEN J. LAWSON  
R. ALBERT MOHLER, JR.  
SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON  
DEREK W. H. THOMAS  
STEPHEN J. NICHOLS  
MARK DEVER



ISSUE

01

SEP/OCT14



**EVERY CHRISTIAN MUST  
HAVE **ONE**PASSION**

*an overruling ambition that dominates  
his life. That supreme purpose must  
be the glory of God.*

# THE WORD DID IT ALL

This present generation of preachers must be men who are fully persuaded of both the purity and the power of Scripture.



**F**or every biblical preacher, the sufficiency of Scripture mandates his commitment to exposit and expound its truths. Paul wrote, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). The word "adequate" means complete, and "equipped" means thoroughly furnished. This verse says that the Scripture makes the preacher capable of doing everything he is called by God to do. He is enabled to meet all the demands of righteous living and godly ministry.

This present generation of preachers must be men who are fully persuaded of both the purity and the power of Scripture. May God raise up such men in this hour, men like the great German

Reformer, Martin Luther, who trusted the outcome of his ministry to the supernatural ability of Scripture to perform its sacred task. Luther was once asked to explain the phenomenon of the Reformation. The Magisterial Reformer answered this way:

I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. While I slept . . . the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a Prince or Emperor inflicted such damage upon it. I did nothing. The Word did it all.

This must be the unshakeable resolve of every preacher today. Now more than ever, men of God must preach the Word (2 Tim 4:2) in the power of His Spirit (1 Thess 1:5). May God raise up a new generation of preachers who

will teach and preach the Word with growing confidence in its all-sufficient power to perform all that God intends. And may they say as Luther thundered in his day: The Word did it all.

It is to that end that OnePassion Ministries exists. As our name indicates, the strategic goal of this ministry is to enflame hearts with an all-consuming desire for Jesus Christ and His gospel. Our primary aim for believers from every walk of life is that they be revived and emboldened to live exclusively for the greatness of God. We are focused on imparting the knowledge of the truth by equipping pastors and church leaders, maturing lay people, and launching a new reformation in the church today. Most specifically, OnePassion is committed to training pastors in expository preaching that is firmly anchored in proclaiming God's Word.

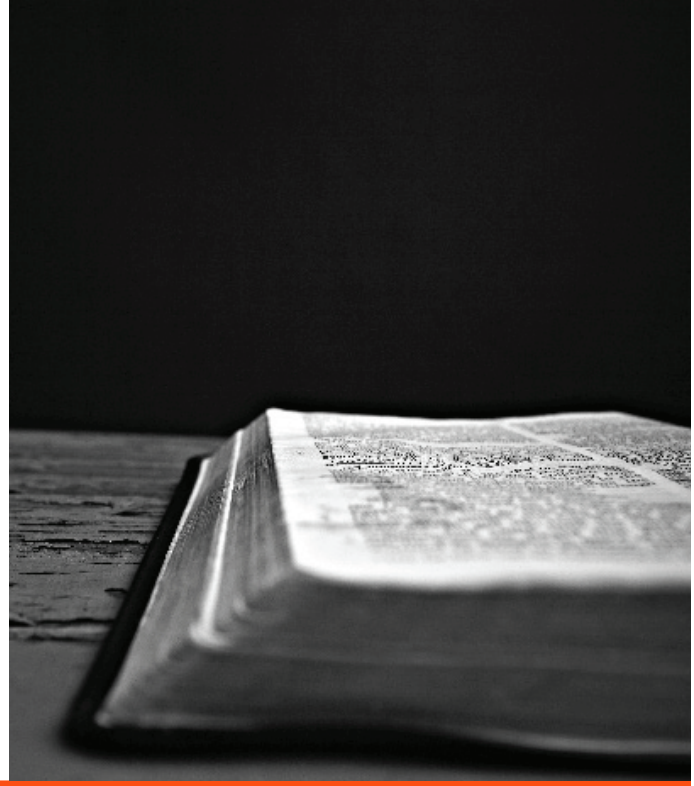
It is my great privilege to introduce to you the inaugural issue of *Expositor Magazine*, the print magazine of OnePassion Ministries. Through the bi-monthly publication of *Expositor*, we desire to address the historical, biblical, and theological dynamics and practice of expository preaching. In addition, *Expositor* will serve pastors, preachers, students, teachers, and lay people by examining historical and current issues related to biblical exposition. We live in a day in which there is a famine in the land for the hearing of God's Word. In response to this spiritual drought, this ministry and magazine is devoted to calling those who stand in pulpits to the high standard of biblical preaching. If we are to see a new reformation in this day, there must, first, be a reformation in the pulpit. ♦

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*The world has abandoned the claims of divine revelation and inerrancy because the church has failed to uphold that truth with Spirit-given power and conviction. The time for all faithful preachers of God's Word to rally in support of Scripture's authority is now.*



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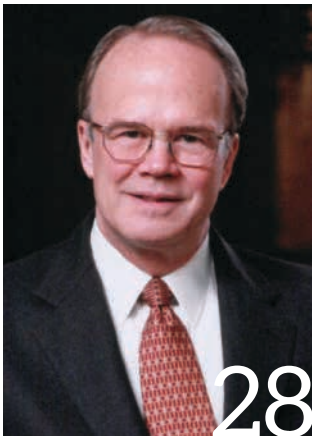
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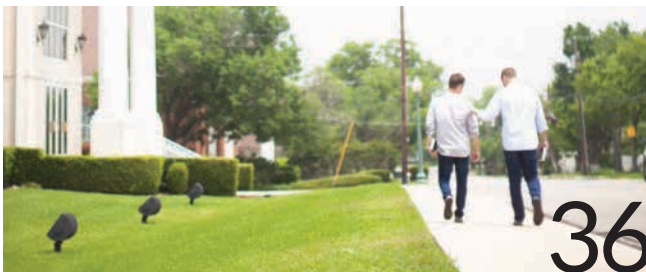
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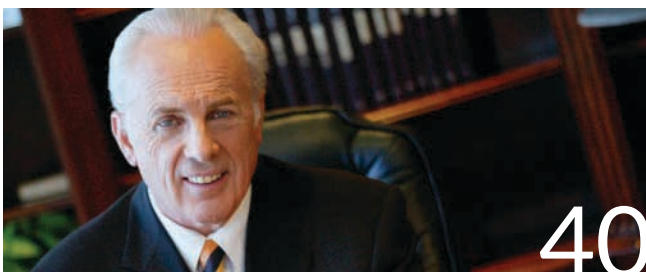
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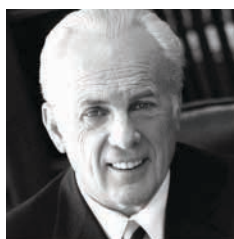
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## BIBLICAL INERRANCY AND THE PROPHETIC WORD



**Steven J. Lawson** is president of OnePassion Ministries, professor of preaching at The Master's Seminary, teaching fellow with Ligonier Ministries, professor-in-residence with Truth Remains, and author of over twenty books.



**John MacArthur** is pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, CA, and president of The Master's College and Seminary. He is the author of over one hundred books and author and editor of *The MacArthur Study Bible*.



**R. C. Sproul** is co-pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, FL, and the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries. His many books include *Scripture Alone* and *Everyone's a Theologian*.



**R. Albert Mohler, Jr.** is president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He also hosts *The Briefing*, a daily podcast analyzing current issues from a Christian worldview.



**Sinclair B. Ferguson** is professor of systematic theology at Redeemer Seminary, the dean of the D.Min. program at Ligonier Academy, and a teaching fellow of Ligonier Ministries.



**Derek W. H. Thomas** is senior minister at First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, SC, and Visiting Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Atlanta.



**Stephen J. Nichols** is president of Reformation Bible College as well as chief academic officer and teaching fellow for Ligonier Ministries. He is author of several books and host of the *5 Minutes in Church History* podcast.



**Mark Dever** is senior minister of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., and is an author and speaker for 9Marks, a ministry concerned with biblical church reform. He is also author of *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*.

We stand in a long line of faithful men who courageously stood united in their commitment to this inerrant and unfailing Truth...



# NOW, IT'S OUR TURN



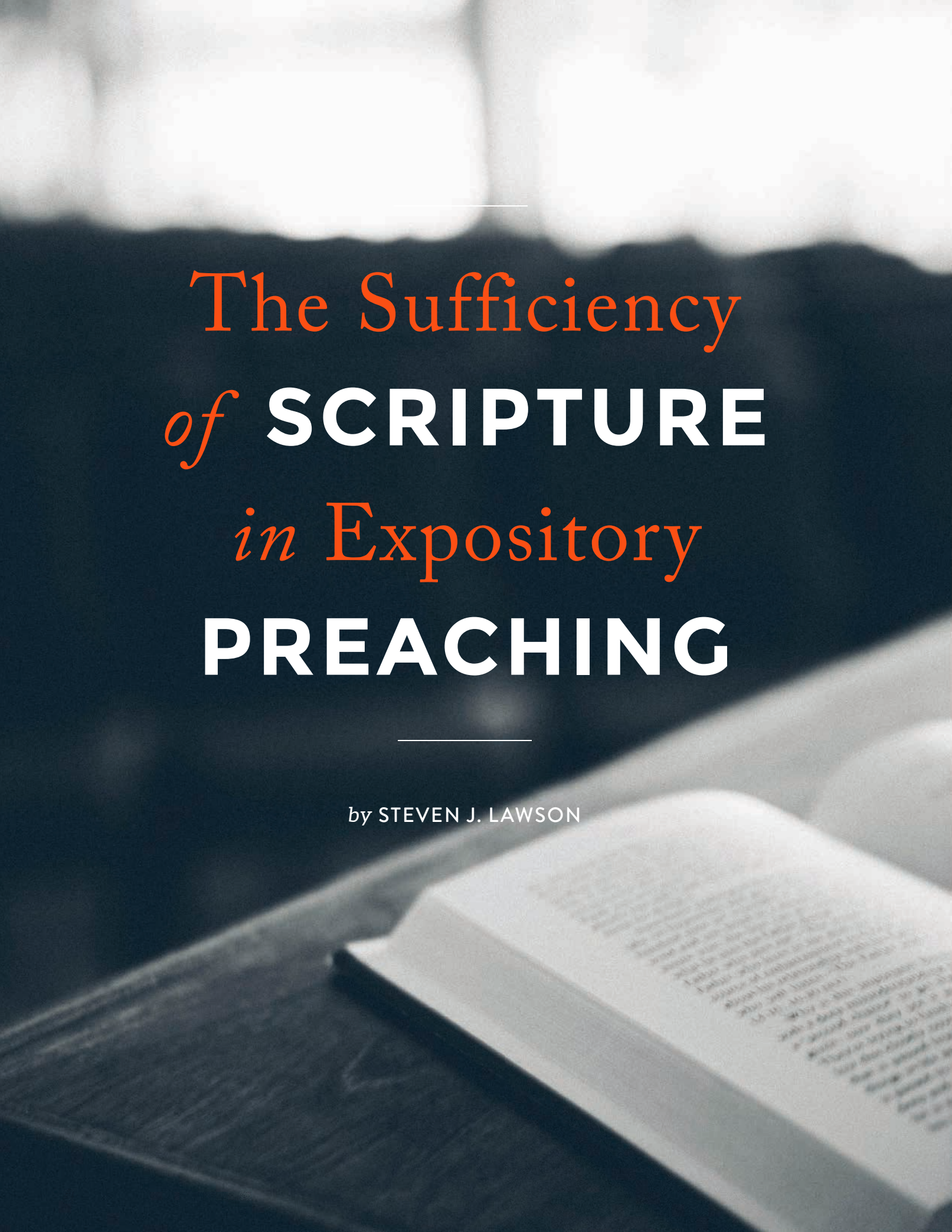
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The Sufficiency  
*of* **SCRIPTURE**  
*in Expository*  
**PREACHING**

---

by STEVEN J. LAWSON



**A**s the church of Jesus Christ advances into the twenty-first century, she finds herself standing at a dangerous crossroads. Two diametrically opposed paths lie before her. To the left are the lethal lies of liberal theology, which destroy and damn. To the right are the life-giving truths of historic Christianity, which save and sanctify. The modern church must choose wisely which road she will take.

Tragically, many mainline denominations are being lured onto the broad path, which is headed to destruction. This path is marked by unbelief and apostasy. Many such groups maintain a form of religion, but deny its power. The fallout is nothing short of devastating. We are witnessing the decline and death of many seminaries, missions agencies, and ministries, before our very eyes. Once serving as sending stations for missionaries, these groups have now become a mission field.

But this is not the burden of this article. Rather, I want to address those who have chosen to follow the narrow path by embracing the divinely inspired Scripture and the sovereign lordship of Jesus Christ. We can give thanks that in many places there exists a renewed commitment to the authority of Scripture and a fundamental belief in the divine person and saving work of Jesus Christ. Among a faithful remnant, authentic Christianity is reemerging around the world. Many new churches and ministries are being raised up by God to carry forward the banner of truth.

However, for these who hold strongly to biblical inerrancy and sovereign grace, another important issue must be addressed. This critical concern deals with the matter of the sufficiency of Scripture. This crucial issue is as follows: Given that this divinely in-

spired book, the Bible, is God's Word, what then is it capable of performing? Strangely, this question seems to be puzzling for many in evangelicalism today.

### **The Problem of the Evangelical Church**

Writing shortly before his death, James Montgomery Boice, pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, observed that while many churches now confess belief in biblical authority, they remain undecided "whether the Bible is sufficient for the church's life and work. We confess its authority, but we discount its ability to do what is necessary to draw unbelievers to Christ, enable us to grow in godliness, provide direction for our lives, and transform and revitalize society." As a result, the church today is adding such novelties as entertainment to exposition, performances to preaching, and theatrics to theology.

With penetrating insight, Boice then added, "In the sixteenth century, the battle was against those who wanted to add church traditions to Scripture, but in our day the battle is against those who have to use worldly means to do God's work." The sufficiency of Scripture, Boice argues, is the urgent issue of the day that must be addressed in the evangelical church.

By the sufficiency of Scripture, we

mean the ability of God's Word to produce any and all spiritual results intended by God, when it is accompanied by the supreme power of the Holy Spirit. When we take this position, we are not asserting that all truth of every kind is found in Scripture. Nor does this position imply that everything Jesus or the apostles ever taught is preserved in Scripture (John 20:30; 21:25). Rather, the sufficiency of Scripture affirms that everything necessary for the spiritual well-being of individuals, both in salvation and sanctification, as well as direction for gospel ministry, is found in God's Word.

### **Westminster Confession: "All Things Necessary"**

The Westminster Confession of Faith defines the sufficiency of Scripture as: "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 Westminster divines understood that Scripture provided "all things necessary" for a believer to rightly live the Christian life in a manner fully pleasing to God. It is also sufficient for ministry, as well. This has been the time-tested position

held by most evangelical churches over the last 350 years.

But in this present hour, there has been a strange departure from this once-firm stance. Perhaps nowhere is this lost confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture more clearly seen than in the evangelical pulpit. The content of preaching is becoming increasingly man-centered and overrun with heavy doses of cultural wisdom, therapeutic advice, psycho-babble, secular pragmatism, and political agendas, all mixed together with a barrage of personal anecdotes. Undoubtedly, this slow shift can only be explained by the complete collapse in confidence that now exists in the church toward the power of Scripture itself.

### The Crisis Brewing Today

A central crisis now confronting Bible-believing churches and organizations, whether they realize it or not, is this matter of the sufficiency of Scripture. Putting one's finger directly on the live nerve, the hard question must be asked: Is the Word of God capable of performing all that is necessary to fulfill God's purposes in the church? If so, then let us preach the Word. If not, then we must adopt new strategies borrowed from the world to carry out ministry. This is the crux of the matter.

Let us reexamine the Scriptures again and remind ourselves of the all-sufficient power of Scripture to save and transform lives. In so doing, may we recommit ourselves, not only to the sufficiency of Scripture, but also to its sufficiency when preached. As we shall discover, the Bible possesses the following abilities:

#### POWER TO CONVICT

First, the Scripture possesses divine power to convict human hearts, exposing sin and revealing one's true need for God and grace. "Convict" refers

to the judicial act of indicting those who have broken the law with a view toward sentencing them. The idea of conviction brings to mind a courtroom scene in which the guilty are accused before a judge and justly condemned. So it is with the ministry of the Word of God. When preached in the power of the Holy Spirit, the proclamation of the Word brings the supernatural power of conviction to the guilty soul. Consequentially, the need for salvation



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is exposed and made known to the condemned heart.

#### The Word Is Living and Active

This is seen in the following text: "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12). The Bible claims to be "alive" (*zōn*), meaning it is full of life—divine life, supernatural life, the very life of God

Himself. Every other book is a dead book, devoid of life. But not the Bible. It alone is alive, always relevant, never stagnant. Martin Luther said, "The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold on me."

According to Hebrews, the Scripture is also "active" (*energēs*). This is the same Greek word from which we draw our English word "energy." This is to say, when Scripture is preached, it is always energetic, always working, always executing God's sovereign purposes. God has said, "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 55:11). Wherever God's Word goes forth, it is always working to accomplish God's will. It never fails to succeed in the work for which it is intended. In other words, it is always capable of fulfilling God's eternal purposes on the earth.

#### Sharper Than Any Two-Edged Sword

Moreover, the Bible is likened to a "two-edged sword." In other words, it is incredibly sharp, able to cut deeply into the human soul. "Two-edged" means that it possesses the ability to cut both ways.

The sword is the Spirit, able to build up and tear down, comfort and afflict, harden and soften, save and damn. "This divine dagger," Charles Spurgeon said, is "all edge...no blunt side." When proclaimed, the Bible does not merely inflict surface scrapes or flesh wounds. Rather, it penetrates the outward façade of a person's life and cuts all the way to the "joints and marrow." Thus, the Bible is able to reveal the depths of man's inward depravity and need for saving grace. No worldly message or conventional wisdom can do this.

Possessing a razor-sharp leading edge, the Word is capable of penetrating into the innermost recesses of the soul. The Scripture cuts far deeper than the felt needs or desires that merely lie on the exterior of a person's life. It does not stroke egos or tickle ears. Instead, the living Word of God cuts to the bone, all the way to a person's real needs, exposing the heart for what it is—desperately sick (Jer 17:9). These unfelt needs remain covered until probed and provoked by Scripture.

### **Like a Hot Knife Through Butter**

Nothing else compares to God's power to convict the human soul than the two-edged sword of His Word, which cuts the heart like a hot knife through butter. Unlike the superficial, synthetic messages of this age, God's Word is actually able to slice to the bare bones of a person's innermost being. The power of the Word leaves one flayed, exposed, and convicted.

With unshakable confidence in the Scripture, John Calvin wrote, "There is nothing so hard or firm in a man, nothing so deeply hidden, that the efficacy of the Word does not penetrate

through it." When properly handled, Holy Scripture is the most powerful cutting instrument known to man. It is a sharp scalpel that is able to slash into the human heart, convicting it of sin and exposing its human depravity. Could there be any better way to reveal our true need for Christ than to preach His Word?

### **POWER TO CONVERT**

Second, the Bible not only has the power to convict; it also possesses the power to convert. No one can be saved apart from hearing and heeding God's Word. The message of the Bible is the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16) that brings the kingdom of God to those born as aliens (Mark 1:15).

### **The Living and Abiding Seed**

The apostle Peter wrote, "For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pet 1:23). This is to say, the imperishable seed, God's Word, contains divine life. By the sovereign operation of the Holy Spirit, the Bible is able to generate the new birth in those

who are spiritually dead. When the seed of the Word is sown into the human heart that is prepared by the Spirit, it will bring forth new life. Unlike mere secular philosophy or human ideology, God's Word can actually impart supernatural life.

This is precisely what occurred on the day of Pentecost after the coming of the Holy Spirit. Peter addressed the thousands who gathered that day by preaching the Word to them (Acts 2:14-36). First, the apostle read Joel 2:28-31, and then he explained who the Lord is upon whom he must call by citing Psalm 16:8-11, Psalm 132:11, and Psalm 110:1. The sermon was a powerful presentation of the Word, and it came with soul-saving efficacy. The crowd was pierced to the heart, stabbed as with a knife, and cried out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent. . . [and] be saved from this perverse generation" (vv. 38, 40). The result was that three thousand souls were saved. Here is the all-sufficient power of Scripture to convert—no entertainment, just exposition.

Furthermore, the Word is "abiding," that is, it is able to perform a lasting



work never to be reversed. The conversion that Scripture produces is not a mere passing fancy, but lasts for all eternity.

### The Power of God unto Salvation

Today's lost confidence in the Scripture's sufficiency to convert sinners to Christ is greatly impeding true evangelism. If preachers would preach Scripture-saturated messages, the spurious conversions so prevalent in many churches today would be drastically reduced. Religious thoughts, emotional appeals, colorful illustrations, and captivating stories, when devoid of the Word, may stir the emotions for a moment, but cannot save the soul for eternity. The Word alone can engender faith in the human heart (Rom 10:17) and can bring saving faith to the hearer (1 Cor 1:21).

Paul knew this when he identified the "sacred writings" as alone being able to "give you the wisdom that leads to salvation" (2 Tim 3:15). There can be no true, saving faith in Christ until His Word is clearly and cogently proclaimed. So, why preach anything else to convert sinners?

### POWER TO CONFORM

Third, the sufficiency of Scripture is seen in its power to conform a believer into the image of Jesus Christ. This is the sanctifying work of the Word, which sets apart all disciples from the defilements of the world and the pollution of one's sinful flesh unto God and His holiness. The Word of God cleanses the soul that receives it by faith (John 15:3). Christ sanctifies the church "by the washing of water with the word" (Eph 5:26).

### Your Word Is Truth

In His high priestly prayer, Jesus interceded with the Father, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth" (John 17:17). "Sanctify" means to be set apart from the corrupting power of sin and to be separated unto personal purity

and holiness. When Christ prayed for His disciples, He rightly understood that spiritual growth unto godliness is realized by the power of the Word conforming believers into the likeness of Christ. Like produces like. Only the holy Bible can produce a holy life.

Other books inform, and some reform, but this Book transforms. The Word of God transforms a person at the deepest level, from the inside out, into Christ-likeness. This is why the importance of expository preaching cannot be overstated. Believers will never be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29) apart from a continual exposure to the Word.



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### The Pure Milk of the Word

Peter emphasized this "ordinary means" for sanctification through the Word preached (1 Pet 1:25) by drawing an analogy with a baby who desires nourishment. The apostle challenged all believers: "like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation" (1 Pet 2:2). This means that the Word feeds and fuels believers, nourishing and stimulating their spiritual growth into Christian maturity. To preach anything else than the Bible is to serve people spiritual "junk food." Such an inadequate diet stunts the growth of people, confining them to a state of malnutrition. The Scripture must be our daily food (Deut 8:3; Matt 4:4). It alone can cause us to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord

Jesus Christ.

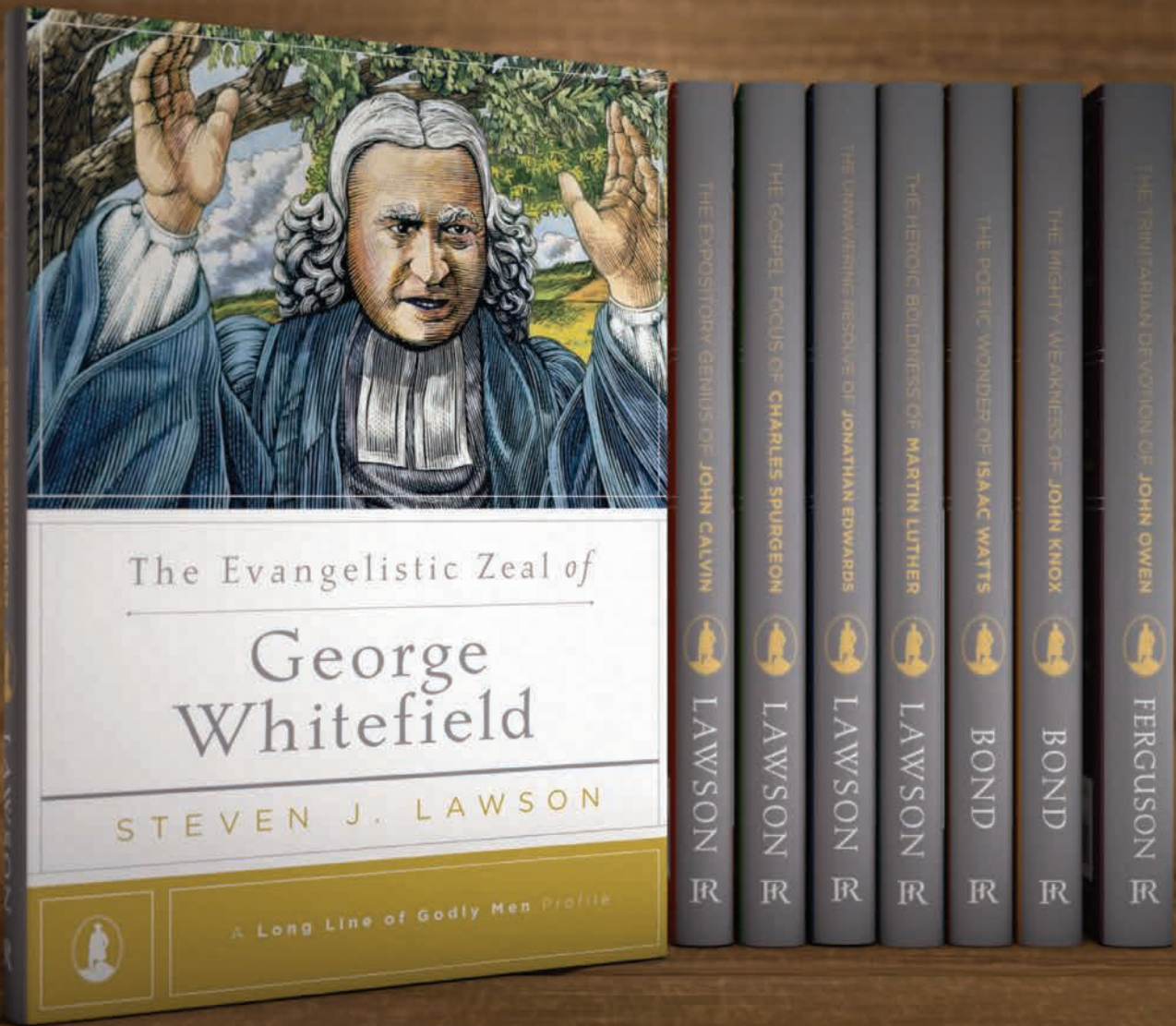
This being so, it is incumbent upon every pastor to be serving a steady diet of the Word from the pulpit. The apostle John points out that spiritual development by which one reaches the next level of spiritual growth occurs because "the word of God abides in you" (1 John 2:14). When so many believers are spiritually underfed, is it any wonder that their spiritual growth is stunted? Every preacher must renew his commitment to serve a full feast in the Scripture. If congregations are to mature, then pastors must bring them consistent biblical teaching. Why preach anything else to cultivate believers?

### The All-Sufficient Word

A firm belief in the infallibility of God's Word emboldened Spurgeon as he preached. He declared, "If I did not believe in the infallibility of Scripture—the absolute infallibility of it from cover to cover, I would never enter this pulpit again!" If the Bible cannot be trusted, he understood that he had no truth to preach. He said, "If I did not believe in the infallibility of the Book, I would rather be without it." A fallible book, Spurgeon reasoned, is not worth preaching. Only a pure book, he believed, contains the perfect message of salvation.

So let us take up the Book and proclaim its truths with growing confidence. The Bible is an infallible guide to those who follow it, and it addresses all the essential areas of life. The Scriptures have every ability to lead our lives in the direction they should take. The Word is more than adequate to shine light into man's chaos and confusion, replacing ignorance and lack of understanding with lucid direction, eternal perspective, and divine insight.

This being true, why preach anything else? ♦



## LIVES WELL LIVED

From Spurgeon to Luther, certain lives throughout church history are remembered as special testaments of God's faithfulness. Through preaching, teaching, hymnody, and their courageous choices, they illustrate what God's grace can accomplish through a life submitted to His purposes. The Long Line of Godly Men profile series offers readers an opportunity to learn from these exemplary lives. **Now available in print and digital editions wherever books are sold.**

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- *The Trinitarian Devotion of John Owen*
- *The Evangelistic Zeal of George Whitefield*

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Just How  
**HIGH**  
Was Jesus'  
*View of*  
**SCRIPTURE?**

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by JOHN MACARTHUR



**F**rom the beginning of our Lord's public ministry, His most persistent adversaries were not open infidels or purveyors of strange religions, but the foremost religious leaders in all of Israel. They hounded and oppressed Jesus relentlessly from Judea to Galilee and beyond. The final conspiratorial campaign to destroy Him was ultimately conceived and orchestrated in secret by a duly established council of Israel's chief priests and lawyers (John 11:47–57).

That council was known as the *Sanhedrin*. It was the highest governing body in Judaism and the Supreme Court in all matters involving Moses' law. Council members were biblical scholars with a sophisticated knowledge of the Old Testament. They were not religious dabblers promoting some watered-down seeker-sensitive brand of spirituality. There was nothing casual or cosmopolitan about their religion. In fact, they looked down with contempt on the *Hellenists* (Jews who embraced the language and lifestyle of secular Greek culture). No one devoted enough to become a recognized religious leader in first-century Judaism ever had any interest in the frivolous values, fashions, or entertainments that captivated the rest of the Roman Empire. These men deplored idolatry in all its usual forms, especially the subtle and syncretistic trends that had led their ancestors into apostasy so many times in the Old Testament record.

Even more significantly, in comparison to most of their ancestors, as well as most of their contemporaries, they had an extremely high view of Scripture.

### **The Pharisees and Sadducees**

The council comprised a blend of Pharisees and Sadducees. Frankly, unity was rare among those two sects. On several key matters of doctrine, Pharisees and Sadducees were intensely adversarial. But the one thing they did hold in

common (besides their contempt for Jesus) was the belief that Scripture is the inspired Word of God and therefore authoritative. Their interpretations of Scripture differed greatly on several important points, so they often disputed among themselves about what various passages of Scripture might mean. But they did not question the authority or the trustworthiness of Scripture.

The *Sadducees* were the smaller of the two sects, but they held a majority on the council. They were an aristocratic group. The high priesthood was an inherited office, and it had been in the hands of Sadducees for generations. Sadducees therefore controlled the Temple and its concessions, and they owned most of the wealth and elite status of the priestly class. Despite their fairly small numbers, the Sadducees wielded a lot of clout.

They were harsh in their judgments, narrow-minded in their beliefs, and cruel in the way they wielded their power. All those characteristics are evident in the New Testament record. And for all those reasons, the Sadducees enjoyed little popular support among the people of Israel.

But the Sadducees did formally affirm the authority and accuracy of Scripture. In fact, they were strict literalists in their approach to interpreting the words of the text. That may seem surprising at first, because every time Scripture describes the beliefs of the Sadducees, it makes a point of telling

us that they rejected belief in angels, the afterlife, and the idea of eternal rewards or punishment (Matt 22:23; Luke 20:27; Acts 23:8).

As a matter of fact, the Sadducees' dismissal of practically every invisible reality meant their doctrine had a lot in common with modern theological liberalism. Indeed, this one aspect of Sadducean doctrine severely corrupted their entire belief system—and their morals. Obviously, because they had purged both the hope of reward and the fear of punishment from their worldview, nothing besides here-and-now pleasures had any real value to them. In the ultimate sense, nothing really mattered much to them except their tenuous hold on political power.

How then could the Sadducees be literalists, holding an uncommonly high view of Scripture, if they rejected the resurrection and eternity of the soul?

The answer lies in the fact that they regarded the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses) as the sole and sufficient source of all true doctrine. The substance of the Sadducees' whole belief system was drawn from the Pentateuch. They saw the rest of the Old Testament as a divine commentary on what Moses wrote. Any doctrine not expressly stated by Moses was simply not part of their credo. And Moses, frankly, wrote nothing clear and explicit about heaven, hell, or the eternity of the human soul.

When the Sadducees encountered poetic or prophetic verses that seemed to speak of resurrection (texts such as Job 19:25-26; Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2, etc.), they set those texts aside as mysterious. (How could those passages be commenting on resurrection if Moses never mentions resurrection in his five books?) In their system, *sheol* (the Hebrew word for the realm of the dead, which is often translated "hell" in the KJV) was always taken as a reference to the grave.

Psalm 9:17, then, becomes, "The wicked will return to Sheol, even all the nations who forget God." There's not much horror in that, because in the end, according to the Sadducees, every *soul* ceases to exist at death, and every *body* will ultimately be sent to the same kind of dead-end grave, where it will permanently return to dust. End of story. This denial of any resurrection or afterlife was a perennial point of contention between Sadducees and Pharisees (Acts 23:7).

The *Pharisees* were a larger sect, more popular with the people, more strict in their application of the law, and more thorough in the attention they gave to the fine points of Scripture. In fact, their whole view of Scripture is best understood by their obsession with minutiae—especially the trivial details of ceremonial law. For example, Leviticus 27:30 says, "Thus all the tithes of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord." Deuteronomy 14:22 seems to explain the meaning of that command by saying it's the *yield* of the seed (what it produces at harvest) that must be tithed. But just to be sure, the Pharisees meticulously counted seeds—even tiny seeds like cumin and dill—to make certain they were offering a proper tithe (Matt 23:23).

Pharisees also generally preferred a literal interpretation of the text, but they were not reluctant to go beyond Scripture, inventing many extrabiblical traditions in order to erect a kind of legalistic guard-rail around biblical law in an attempt to eliminate accidental breaches of the law.

When manmade traditions are treated as inviolable, they inevitably create a kind of skewed hermeneutical grid that gets imposed on Scripture. That is what happened with the Pharisees' doctrine. In effect, their own manmade tradi-

## JESUS BUILT HIS ENTIRE APOLOGETIC AGAINST THE SADDUCEES AND PHARISEES ON THE ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE.

tions stood over Scripture, governing how God's Word was to be read.

Here's the point: Both Pharisees and Sadducees formally affirmed the authority of Scripture. Both claimed to have a high view of Scripture. Both were adept at using the Bible to justify their distinctive views. And yet both set themselves in fierce opposition to Jesus and His ministry.

If that were all we knew about Jewish politics in the time of Christ, and if we were prone to think the way many in the evangelical academy today do, we might expect Christ to scold the religious leaders for "making an idol out of Scripture." If Jesus Himself had

avored the rationale and rhetorical style that dominate popular religion today, He might have told both groups to lighten up, lay off one another, and concentrate less on hermeneutics and doctrine while striving more to be loving and peaceable.

### The Apologetic of Jesus

That was *not* Jesus' approach. He consistently answered both Pharisees and Sadducees by pointing out that their doctrine of Scripture was still too low.

"If you believed Moses, you would believe Me" (John 5:46). "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men. . . . You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition" (Mark 7:8-9). Never once dismissing or brushing aside a legitimate appeal to Scripture, Jesus built His entire apologetic against the Sadducees and Pharisees on the absolute authority of Scripture:

- "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 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" (Matt 5:17-18).
- "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail" (Luke 16:17).
- "Have you not even read this Scripture . . . ?" (Mark 12:10).
- "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away" (Luke 21:33).
- "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

J. C. Ryle said of John 10:35, "Few passages appear to me to prove so incon-



trovertibly the plenary inspiration and divine authority of every word in the original text of the Bible."

And finally, knowing that He was nearing the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus spoke directly to some leading Sadducees, diagnosing the cause of all their theological problems, saying, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matt 22:29).

The context of that last quotation is significant. On more than one occasion, Jewish leaders had tried to trap Jesus with theological conundrums they themselves had no answer for. Their attempts to embarrass Him had always failed. But in Matthew 22, the Sadducees were desperate. It was the final week of Jesus' earthly ministry. He had just (for the second time) "overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves" (Matt 21:12), ruining a lucrative business in which the Sadducees had a monopoly interest. He had also recently raised Lazarus from the dead, inflaming the populace against the Sadducees' no-resurrection doctrine.

So they posed to Him a riddle that had always confounded their enemies, the Pharisees. It was the story of a woman whose husband died before she had children. Under the principle of levirate marriage spelled out in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, it was the duty of her unmarried brother-in-law to marry her and raise up an heir for the elder brother. In the Sadducees' parable, the eldest of seven brothers died, and each younger sibling married the widow and died in succession, "down to the seventh. Last of all, the woman died" (Matt 22:26-27).

The question that occurs to me is why anyone agreed to marry her at all after the death of the third or fourth brother. The question the Sadducees asked Jesus, however, was supposed

to stump Him: "In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her" (v. 28).

But note well His answer: "You are mistaken, *not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God*" (v. 29, emphasis added).

I love the direct approach Jesus takes: "You are wrong." He uses a strong term (the Greek word *planē*, from which we get the English word *planet*), suggesting that they are totally unhinged and wandering in the blackness of darkness.

But even more to the point, He says (bitingly) that these men who fancied themselves experts in biblical scholarship didn't really know the Scriptures at all: "But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living" (vv. 31-32).

Notice the powerful force of the argument: Jesus is quoting Exodus 3:6, from the heart of the Pentateuch—a text whose doctrine they could not dispute. And the logic of the argument hinges on the verb tense inherent in God's name: "I AM"—present, continuous tense. God Himself is speaking, long after the deaths of the original patriarchs. What is the inference? Jesus Himself makes it embarrassingly obvious in a simple statement that perfectly and conclusively answers the Sadducees' most infamous error: "He is not God of the dead, but of the living."

And the Sadducees were silenced.

### **A Definitive and Biblical Answer**

What stands out here is that Jesus' answer to these self-styled biblicists was a biblical answer, and a definitive one. Notice three key principles it reveals about Jesus' own supremely high view of Scripture:

First, it shows that *the authority and inerrancy of Scripture extends to every el-*

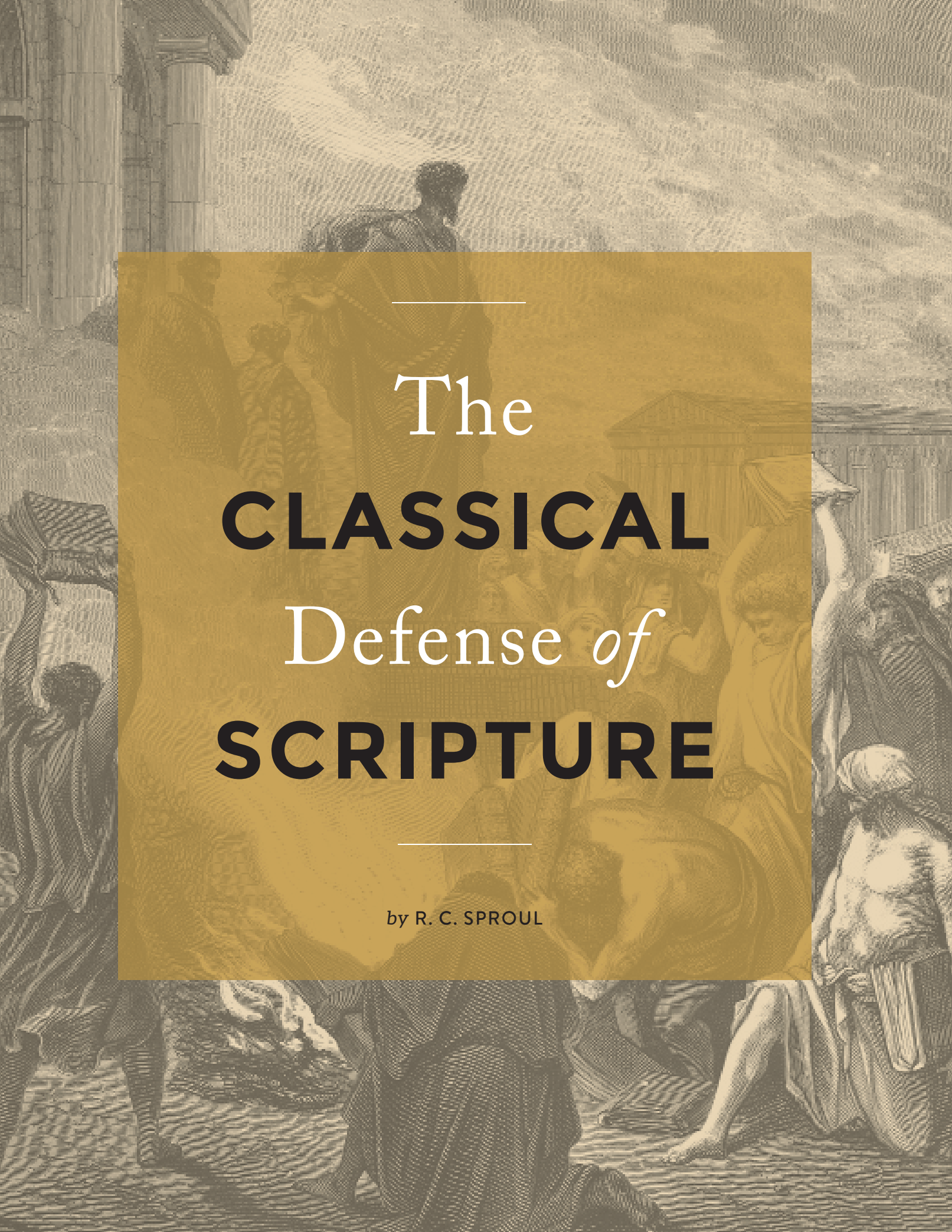
*ement of the text*, including not only the tiny jots and tittles that were used to spell the actual words, but also the verb tenses. Jesus' whole point was based on the tense of the simplest, most common verb in the Hebrew language.

Second, it proves that *the truth of Scripture includes every valid implication that can be drawn from the text; not just the explicit statements*. Obviously, we must read Scripture with conscientious care. Only our valid inferences are true, but if we can indeed draw a proper deduction by good and necessary consequence through the application of sound logical principles, the implications of the biblical text are just as true as the straightforward propositions explicitly set forth therein. Jesus' entire point here is a truth that is implicit in the verse He quoted—and that truth is nowhere stated explicitly in any of the writings of Moses. Yet He clearly regarded it as authoritative revelation that the Sadducees ought to have recognized and affirmed. He says emphatically that they were in error for not doing so.

And third, *a true knowledge of Scripture entails more than mere familiarity with the words of the text*. Even though they were full of scholarly head knowledge, in reality the Sadducees had no true understanding of either "the Scriptures [or] the power of God." And that was the case precisely because their interest in such things was academic only. Their pedantic obsession with disputes and details was motivated not by faith, but by a desire for status in the eyes of others.

That same spirit is precisely why it is en vogue nowadays for evangelical academics to question or downplay the inerrancy of Scripture.

But our goal as believers should be to view Scripture the way Jesus did—and that means we must elevate our view of Scripture, not lower it. ♦



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The  
**CLASSICAL**  
Defense *of*  
**SCRIPTURE**

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by R. C. SPROUL

The so-called "battle for the Bible" doesn't appear to be ending anytime soon. It's somewhat understandable, then, that many evangelicals are showing signs of weariness. Many churches have given up any attempt to provide a coherent defense of biblical inerrancy, preferring to assume that the Bible is true without ever giving people reasons to believe it.

The consequences of this retreat have been cataclysmic, with large numbers of young people abandoning their profession of faith because they wrongly perceive the Bible to be opposed to science, historical fact, and other matters. We shouldn't be surprised at this trend if we fail to provide a coherent apologetic—a sound defense of the truthfulness of Scripture in all its parts. God made us with minds that search for sound reasons to believe what we believe, and lacking those reasons, those who think deeply about these matters will be disturbed if no one helps them find grounding for their faith.

Furthermore, the Lord has charged us with the solemn duty and privilege of giving an answer to the world regarding the hope within us (1 Pet 3:15–16). A defense of the Bible's inerrancy is not an end in itself but a means that the Holy Spirit can use to tear down intellectual strongholds and bring people to saving faith.

### **A Sound Apologetic**

Developing a sound apologetic for biblical inerrancy requires us to recognize some fundamental differences between believers and unbelievers. With regard to basic commitments and beliefs, believers and unbelievers are not on the same page. The Christian trusts in Christ alone for salvation and believes that the Bible teaches no error. The non-Christian trusts in himself and denies that the Bible is the Word of

God. If we approach non-Christians with our Christian assumptions, we will be unable to communicate with them. Practically speaking, this means we cannot start our defense from the premise that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. That is the conclusion of our defense, and the unbeliever does not share it. He starts out denying the conclusion, so beginning with it gets us nowhere. Moreover, assuming the conclusion of our argument at the outset leads to reasoning that is viciously circular. At the end of the day we end up with a two-step argument:

Premise: The Bible says that it is the Word of God.

Conclusion: Therefore, the Bible is the Word of God.

That argument isn't compelling, and it can be used for any other religious book such as the Qur'an or the Book of Mormon.

A sound apologetic doesn't assume the conclusion, but it begins where believers and unbelievers share common ground. Rooted in the conviction that unbelievers bear God's image no less than we do, we look for a common starting point that reflects that image. The Lord made all people to learn through ordinary sense perception and basic rules of logic that we apply in the disciplines of history, science, mathematics, and so on. Through these, we

can find premises for grounding our argument that do not assume its conclusion—premises we share with people who are not yet Christians.

### **A Classical Defense**

If you're familiar with the debate regarding various apologetic methodologies, you'll recognize that I am talking about defending the inerrancy of Scripture using a classical apologetic. Using both inductive and deductive arguments, as well as external and internal evidence, the classical approach proceeds on the basis of a progression from the premise of the basic or general trustworthiness of Scripture to the conclusion of its inerrancy. This is a basic outline of the argument:

Premise A: The Bible is a basically reliable historical document.

Premise B: This basically reliable document gives us sufficient evidence to believe with confidence that Jesus Christ is God.

Premise C: Because Jesus Christ is God, He is infallible.

Premise D: Jesus Christ teaches that the Bible is more than basically trustworthy; it is the very Word of God.

Premise E: Because God is utterly trustworthy, the Word that comes from Him is utterly trustworthy.

Conclusion: Based on the infallible authority of Jesus Christ, who says the Bible is utterly trustworthy, the Bible is inerrant.

Let's examine these premises one by one:

**The Bible is a basically reliable historical document.** Were this premise false, our argument would collapse. If the biblical documents are not at least basically trustworthy, we have no historical basis for knowing Jesus at

We're blessed to live in a day wherein we have access to an abundance of historical, textual, and archaeological research that has demonstrated the reliability of the biblical narrative.

all. Without a reliable historical witness to Jesus, the Christian faith would be reduced to esotericism.

We're blessed to live in a day wherein we have access to an abundance of historical, textual, and archaeological research that has demonstrated the reliability of the biblical narrative. Liberal critics dispute the Bible's accuracy at points, but only the most radical critics deny that Scripture accurately depicts the life of Jesus. Decades ago, William F. Albright, the founder of modern biblical archaeology, remarked that there is no excuse for denying the reliability of the New Testament given the evidence that has been unearthed

in Palestine and the Mediterranean region. There is empirical evidence for much of the New Testament account, and in appealing to this evidence we have a crucial point of contact with unbelievers. Without such evidence, we have fideism, a blind leap into the dark that Christ never endorses.

**This basically reliable document [the Bible] gives us sufficient evidence to believe with confidence that Jesus Christ is God.** Many people read the Bible

and fail to believe that Christ is God, but that is not due to a lack of evidence. Rather, the Scriptural evidence for the deity of Christ is compelling. If the biblical narrative is basically reliable, its testimony to the deity of Jesus is basically reliable. According to the New Testament, Christ performed miracles, raised the dead, walked on water, was Himself victorious over the grave, and claimed to be God.

Who but God could do such things?

Without the work of the Holy Spirit, we cannot receive Christ as Lord and Savior. Yet the Holy Spirit does not make us believe contrary to or despite the evidence. Instead, He enables us to submit to the sound testimony of the Bible—to the evidence—that describes our Lord's identity.

**Because Jesus Christ is God, He is infallible.** Traditionally, evangelical Christians have agreed that Jesus Christ is the supreme authority over the church. They have also agreed that He is infallible. In recent years, however, it has become fashionable to

question our Lord's infallibility. Often, people attempt to justify this view by appealing to Chalcedonian Christology and the two natures of Jesus. Jesus, according to the Council of Chalcedon, is very God and very man. He is truly human, possessing everything that makes human beings human. Those who argue for a fallible Jesus then postulate that He had, in His humanity, erroneous views, since "to err is human." They view error as inherent to humanity and thus assert that Jesus could be truly human only if He erred.

Essentially, those who argue this way make omniscience according to our Lord's humanity the criterion for inerrancy. In other words, they assume that in order to make true statements, hold true beliefs, or not err, human beings—even our Lord in His humanity—must have full knowledge of all things. Yet, this assertion is based upon a radical misunderstanding of the incarnation and what it means to be truly human. In glory, we will not hold any false beliefs, and so we will not err. At that point, we will still be truly human, but we will not know everything that can be known, and we will never know everything that can be known. Jesus did not have to be omniscient as a man in order to be free from error as a man. He enjoyed omniscience according to His deity, but He grew in knowledge according to His humanity. To require omniscience according to His humanity in order for Him to be infallible confuses the two natures of Christ—two natures that must be distinguished but never separated.

Further, Jesus does not have to be omniscient to have never taught error. But He must have never taught error to be sinless. If Jesus, claiming to be sent from God and invoking the authority of God in His teaching, errs in that teaching, He is guilty of sin. He who says, "I am . . . the truth" (John 14:6), proves that claim false the first time He errs. Anyone claiming absolute authority in His teaching must be absolutely



trustworthy; otherwise, the authority is not absolute.

**Jesus Christ teaches that the Bible is more than basically trustworthy; it is the very Word of God.**

Few things are clearer about the life of Jesus than His high view of Scripture. He regarded the biblical text as utterly trustworthy and having divine authority. It takes but a few examples to prove the point. In Matthew 19:4–5, Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24, which gives us Moses' comment on the significance of marriage. But our Lord says God made the comment, and He makes no reference in this instance to Moses. In other words, Jesus saw the words of Moses and the words of the other human authors of the Old Testament as the words of God Himself. We read in John 10:35 that Jesus said, "Scripture cannot be broken." He believed there was an enduring and permanent validity to the Scriptures because He was convinced that the Bible is the very Word of God.

**Because God is utterly trustworthy, the Word that comes from Him is utterly trustworthy.**

If God is utterly trustworthy, His Word is utterly trustworthy. However, many who otherwise confess that God is utterly trustworthy have denied the inerrancy of Scripture because of the means by which the Bible has come

to us. Even though God is infallible, they say, His use of fallible human beings to write Scripture means that the end product—the written Scriptures—must have some errors.

This belief confuses ability and actuality. In other words, that human beings are fallible means only that they are capable of erring; it does not mean they must err. When we confess the historical, orthodox Christian understanding of the inerrancy of Scripture, we are not saying anything about the intrinsic infallibility of the Bible's human authors; rather, we are saying something about the intrinsic infallibility of God. We are talking about what God has actually done through the human authors of the biblical text. The confession of the inerrancy of Scripture rests on the integrity of God Himself. If God is infallible and always speaks the truth, and if He inspired the entire Bible, then the Bible must be true in all that it affirms. That God spoke through human authors does not change this truth. God inspired the Scriptures not by making the men who wrote it inherently infallible but by superintending them so as to keep them from making errors.

This does not mean that Scripture's grammar must be flawless, that there can be no variations in the way it describes events, or that it must employ the same degree of mathematical and numerical precision we enjoy today. Inerrancy has to do with the concept of

truth. Truth can be conveyed by unrefined grammar, viewing the same event from different perspectives, rounding numbers, and so forth. But the inerrancy of Scripture means there is no room for contradictions, mistakes, or deception in what it affirms.

**Defending Inerrancy and Infallibility**

Thus, we have our sound defense for biblical inerrancy: Scripture is basically reliable; therefore, it testifies reliably that Jesus is God. Since Jesus is God, He is infallible and does not teach error. Because Jesus never erred, He was telling the truth that the Bible is the very Word of God. Due to Scripture being the very Word of God, who is Himself the truth, the Bible itself teaches no falsehood.

This is a solid, non-circular argument, and we must be ready to present it. Nothing less than the trustworthiness of God Himself is at stake in the debates over the inerrancy of Scripture. If Scripture affirms any falsehoods, then either God did not reveal it, or He cannot be trusted. Defending these doctrines is an essential part of our task to give an answer for our hope and to tear down strongholds that exalt themselves against the knowledge of our Creator. By providing a sound defense that meets unbelievers where they are, we fulfill the high calling our Savior has given us. ♦

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a Bible. The person is wearing an orange sweater over a blue and white checkered shirt. The Bible is held in their right hand, with the pages visible. The background is a bright, out-of-focus light.

# the Bible and the Believer

by R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

One of the touchstone passages in all Scripture appears in Deuteronomy 4. My heart and soul are absolutely struck by the question—a rhetorical question, but a very real question—asked in verse 33: "Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you have heard it, and survived?"

Just like the Israelites at Mount Sinai, we are summoned together as God's people. We are summoned to speak of God, to sing about God, and to worship God. It is no small thing to dare to speak of God. As Christians, we have the audacity to claim to teach what God has taught. This, of course, would be a baseless claim—an inconceivable claim—if God had not spoken from the midst of the fire and allowed us to hear.

On what authority do we speak and act? Where do we find the moral and theological conviction to affirm a particular set of truths while denying all other worldviews as false? Is it the authority of the churches constituting our respective denominations? Such authority is no small thing, but is still not enough. Rather, our lives and our convictions, both in word and in deed, are based on the authority of God. He alone could reveal Himself and tell us what we must know. We ground our lives and our convictions in what He has told us.

## Inerrancy: Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy

Article XIX of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy says, "We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ. We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the Church." Inerrancy is so much more than a theological battleground. If that is how we perceive the issue, then we have firmly missed the point. The inerrancy of Scripture ought to posture our hearts toward the Word of God with reverence, humility, and trust. Scripture's inerrancy insures its trustworthiness. Therefore, we may believe it without any hesitation.

The inerrancy and authority of Scripture is central to the church's understanding of the character of God's written Word. Since Scripture is inerrant, the Bible is true and trustworthy in all that it affirms. Since Scripture is "God-breathed," it is the supreme authority for all matters. Scripture is the *norma non normata*, that is, the norm that cannot be normed. In short, the affirmation of biblical inerrancy means nothing more, and nothing less, than this: *when the Bible speaks, God speaks*.

These are by no means abstract theological truths. The inerrancy and authority of the Bible has massive implications for the church and for the individual Christian life. If God has spoken, then the highest human aspiration must be to hear what the Creator has said. Surely the revelation of God is not merely propositions, but it is never less than that. Revelation is personal. The Lord does not speak to us so that we can simply receive informa-

tion. God speaks to us so that we might meet the living God, know Him, and obey Him. As Carl F. H. Henry so poetically phrased it: "God, in Scripture, forfeits His own personal privacy so that we might know Him."

Inerrancy, therefore, must be understood as necessary and integral to the life of the church, the authority of preaching, and the integrity of the Christian life. Without a total commitment to the trustworthiness and truthfulness of the Bible, the church is left without its defining authority, lacking all confidence in its ability to hear God's voice.

The inerrancy and authority of the Bible has massive implications for the church and for the individual Christian life.

The doctrine of inerrancy is the theological bedrock of the practical needs of the church. The church must live by the Word of God, or it will live upon some human authority as a substitute for God's Word. Without the Bible as the supreme and final authority in the church, we are left in what can only be described as a debilitating epistemological crisis. In other words, we are left to ourselves.

### God Has Spoken: Inerrancy and the Christian Life

The title of Francis Schaeffer's classic book, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, in many respects sums up so much of the Christian worldview. There is a God

and He has spoken. God's human creatures, His image-bearers, have not been left without divine direction as to how we might be saved from sin and what God expects of us. Since God's speech is true, what He says about redemption, obedience, and human flourishing can be trusted. Consider these aspects of the character of God's Word.

### If God has spoken, God's Word is ultimately for His glory and our good.

All that God says is spoken for our good. God spoke words of warning to Israel in Deuteronomy in order that Israel might hear the warnings, obey the Word, and not suffer the inevitable consequences of disobedience. It is all for our good, every single word. God's words are like medicine for the soul and food for the body.

### If God has spoken, it is for our redemption.

When we think of the work of God in our salvation, we focus on the culmination and the fulfillment of God's saving work in the accomplished work of Christ on the cross and in His resurrection. But to read the Scripture is to understand that God has been a redeeming, saving God from the very beginning. Genesis 3:15 is a message of redemption. The Exodus is the archetypal redemptive act of the Old Testament. Scripture informs us that Christ is the fulfillment of these prophecies and patterns. Without Scripture, we would not know God as a redeeming God and could not run to Him for grace.

God's redemptive speech is part and parcel of how we enter into God's kingdom. Word and Spirit work in tandem to bring us to new life (1 Pet 1:23). The Spirit of God, in His sovereignty, opens our eyes to see what is in the inerrant Word. Scripture is trustworthy, but our heart does not want to trust what it ought to. Herein lies the sovereignty of God in salvation. When God saves

us, He does not save us apart from His Word. Instead, He saves us by opening our eyes to see His Word and trust it, as it ought to be seen and trusted. In other words, the Holy Spirit does not open our eyes in order that we would embrace the irrational. God's Word is not against reason and we do not trust it

## "If God has spoken, we trust His Word"

against the evidence. Instead, the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see the truth that is plainly in Scripture, which our will had operationally refused to let us see when we were in the dark. As R. C. Sproul states in *Defending Your Faith*, "What the Holy Spirit accomplishes, then, is a breaking down of the barriers in our minds and the hostility of our hearts, thereby enabling us to surrender to the truth of God's Word." The Spirit does not move us to believe against the evidence. He moves us to surrender to the evidence that is there.

**If God has spoken, we must obey.** The Bible is not a word submitted for our consideration. The living God allows us to hear His voice so that we might obey Him. As the Creator speaks to His creatures, He encourages obedience. This is repeated over and over again in both the Old and the New Testaments: "If you obey, you will be blessed and you will live. You will prosper in the land that I am giving you." It is also stated in the negative. "If you disobey, you will be cursed. You will bear My wrath. The nations of the world will cast you out. You will go out before them, to be taken as their exiles. You will be cast out of the land." His Word commands our obedience, and discourages our disobedience.

The Lord does not invite His cov-

enant people to speculate about His character, His power, or His purpose. He demands total obedience, even as He reveals His saving purpose and sets down His covenant. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex 20:2-3).

**If God has spoken, we are to trust.** "Trust and obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." We know that song, or at least some pre-

vious generations knew that song. But it really is a matter of trust. We must fashion a clear defense of Scripture in terms of its inspiration, authority, and perfection in order to fight the spirit of this age and for the urgent health of the church. We must teach that truth, remind ourselves of that truth, and be accountable to that truth. In the end, it all comes down to trust—a hermeneutic of trust, an epistemology of trust, a spirituality and theology of trust.

This is where inerrancy and the Christian life meet. If God has spoken, we trust His Word because we trust Him. Woe to anyone who would sow seeds of mistrust of the Word of God. To fail to trust this Word is, just as Israel was clearly told, to fail to trust in God Himself. Truth is the very foundation of a proper Christian apologetic. An apologetic of trust understands that, in the end, the character of God is what anchors not only our epistemology, but also our redemption. This is the hope we have in this life and in the life to come. We have heard His voice because we have read His Word. That Word is worthy of our trust.

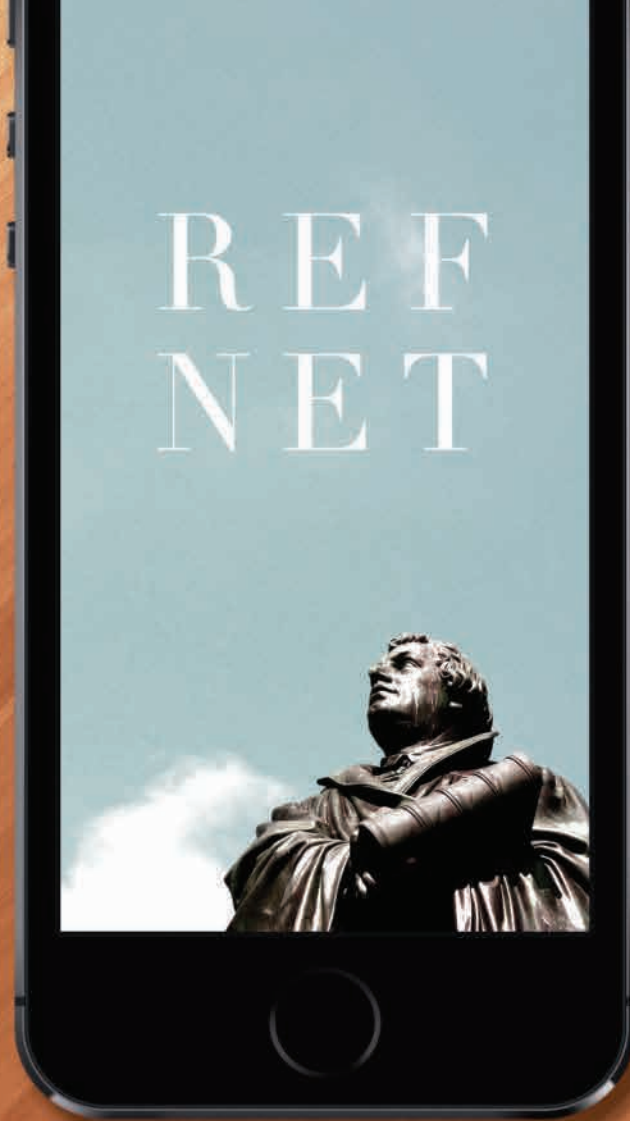
As the church, we understand what it means to gather together as those who, by the grace and mercy of God, have heard the inerrant Word of God. Under the authority of the Word, we gather together as His people. We are

not making this up as we go along. Our task is not to go figure out what to believe or teach. Our task is not to figure out where to find meaning in life. Our task is to trust the inerrant Word that has been entrusted to us. The Word is the foundation of our obedience because it is the only certain, unchanging Word we can follow.

Let us confess, therefore, the inerrancy and authority of Scripture not just as a matter of doctrinal fidelity, but also as integral to the Christian life and witness. Let us submit ourselves before the truth of the Word of God in every dimension of life. Let there be no rival authority, and let us never apologize for our confession of the Scriptures—inerrant, inspired, infallible, and unbroken—as our sole authority for knowledge and doctrine.

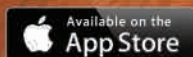
Moreover, the church collectively must walk according to God's Word and uphold it as the normative authority for our faith and practice. Without the Word we are ecclesologically adrift—subject to the whims of the latest ministry fads. Pulpits must model how to entrust one's life to the inerrant Word of God. Christians must learn that the inerrancy of Scripture means we come to Scripture already trusting and affirming what it says. The doctrine of inerrancy should humble our pride and posture our hearts toward a ready and willing obedience. We have no foundation for moral and theological conviction without a trustworthy Word from God. However, if God has spoken, then His Word is true and trustworthy. If God has spoken, then His Word is a sure foundation for the Christian life. We would be wise to stand upon it. ♦





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*The Bible:  
The Living  
Voice of God*

by Sinclair B. Ferguson

# How can I be sure the Bible is the Word of God? Among evangelicals who believe that Scripture really is God's Word, the immediate answer is often: "Because the Bible says it is the Word of God." But is this an adequate biblical response? And does it end all discussion?

In itself it raises two questions. Some might see them as objections, and indeed they are often expressed as such. But in fact these questions can stimulate richer biblical convictions about the Scriptures.

## Scripture's Own Claim—Really?

The first question is this: Does the Bible actually claim to be the Word of God? Before shooting back a sharp "Of course. 2 Timothy 3:16. Issue settled," it may help to think of this as the friendly inquiry of a fellow believer rather than a skeptical rejection of biblical authority (notoriously illustrated in our own time by the Old Testament scholar James Barr in his attempted "hatchet job" book entitled *Fundamentalism*).

So, let us try the question again. Does the Bible itself claim to be the Word of God? Barr's *prima facie* objection to this was in essence: "How could it, since until the ink dried on Revelation 22:21 there was no such object as 'The Bible' to make such a claim?" In this sense what would be required to enable us to say "The Bible claims to be the Word of God" would be a closing note at the end of the last book of the Bible informing us that the books and letters listed by the author claim to be God's Word.

Raising the question in this way underlines that we need a more sensitive New Testament answer than simply "2 Timothy 3:16: The Bible claims to be the Word of God." This involves fleshing out at least the following four principles:

1. The Lord Jesus, our divine authority, placed His imprimatur on the Old Testament as the Word of God. For him it was "the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4). What came from that mouth and became Scripture "cannot be broken" (John 10:35). It was written in to His attitude to Scripture that anything it said must come to pass. His view of the Old Testament is reflected in 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

2. As our divine authority, the Lord Jesus called and equipped His apostles to add to Scripture. This was *inter alia* what He had in view when He taught them in the Upper Room. For this purpose He later breathed His Spirit on them (John 20:22) and commanded them to take the gospel to the ends of the earth (Matt 28:18-20) as His witnesses (Acts 1:8). Indeed, logistically, this small apostolic band could take the gospel to the ends of the earth only if their message were written down and disseminated in that form.

3. In light of this the apostles were conscious that Jesus had equipped them to be His *shaliachim* and promised His Spirit to enable them to speak and write on His behalf and with His authority.

*Shaliach* (the singular) is the Hebrew equivalent of the New Testament's word *apostolos*. The nearest English equivalent is "Power-of-Attorney"—someone given full authority to act on behalf of another. This principle explains a number of otherwise puzzling statements in the Gospels (for example, Matthew 10:40 and John 20:23). The Christ who, by His Spirit, gave the

Old Testament Scriptures through His *shaliachim* whom He empowered by His Spirit (1 Pet 1:11; 2 Pet 1:21) now equipped the apostolic fellowship as His *shaliachim* and empowered them by the same Spirit to author the New Testament.

4. The apostles themselves were conscious of this aspect of their office. Hence Paul's insistence on his apostolic calling (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8-11). This undergirds Paul's comment that the Thessalonians received the (*apostolic*) word "not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God" (1 Thess 2:13). This was true whether the word came by mouth or by letters (2 Thess 2:15).

## Communicating Revelation

Throughout the New Testament the authors give various hints that they are consciously communicating revelation that matches the authority of the Old Testament while possessing fuller content. They consciously function as those appointed with "Power-of-Attorney" with respect to the Lord Jesus.

Thus, throughout the New Testament we are confronted by (i) our Lord's confirmation that the Old Testament is the Word of God, and in addition by (ii) the apostles' consciousness that their speech and writing constitute nothing less than the Word of God. As Peter famously comments, Paul's letters belong in the same category as what he calls "the other Scriptures."

Thus, the Scriptures of both Old and New Testaments exude a self-con-

scious awareness that they constitute the very Word of God. In this sense (contra James Barr), the Bible does indeed "claim" to be the Word of God.

But we need to say more, for this leads directly to the second question.

### Convinced?

From one point of view, it is not sound or convincing logic to say: "The Bible is the Word of God because it claims to be the Word of God." After all, we would challenge any logic that stated: "We believe the Book of Mormon is the Word of God because it claims to be the Word of God." Expressed thus these syllogisms involve the fallacy known as *petitio principii*, i.e. the argument is circular; the conclusion needs to be smuggled into the premise to make the argument work.

A more biblical approach is suggested by the words of Paul earlier cited from 1 Thessalonians. The Thessalonians accepted the Word of God as the Word of God. To use the language of the older theologians, the Bible "doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God" and therefore it is appropriate for us to recognize that this is indeed the case.

This is often referred to as the *auto-pistic* character of Scripture. The Bible provides us with self-conscious indications that it is God's Word. These not only include the claim of "thus says the

Lord" and the apostolic consciousness of adding to Scripture, but also the more specific statements made by Jesus and the apostles.

The Westminster Confession of Faith expresses this succinctly when it notes that:

The heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God.

As has often enough been pointed out, the difference between inspiration and mere authorial perspiration is immediately obvious when one reads the writings of the earliest post-New Testament authors. The Bible does indeed possess objective indications of its unique character.

This aspect of the doctrine of Scripture goes hand in glove with another vital element, namely the internal testimony (or witness) of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Confession of Faith rightly adds that while:

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend esteem of the holy scripture . . .

Yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts.

### The Spirit's Work and Witness

The central biblical basis for this testimony is found in Paul's powerful discussion of the Spirit's work in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16. Using a human analogy, he reasons that just as a person's thoughts are known only by the person's spirit, so only the Spirit of God knows the mind of God (he does not mean here to exclude the Son of God). We therefore need to receive the Spirit's help if we are to bow to Scripture as the Word of God.

But there is a complication. For I am a "natural (*psuchikos*)" person, and not a "spiritual (*pneumatikos*)" one (v. 14). As a result I am incapable of accepting spiritual reality; indeed, it seems foolish to me. I cannot understand "the things of the Spirit of God" because they are spiritually discerned. Or, to use Paul's language in Ephesians, because I am "dead in...trespasses and



sins" (Eph 2:1) I therefore need more than the words of Scripture in order to believe that it is the Word of God. I need a spiritual resurrection that will give me new life and also enable me to grasp, appreciate, and receive that to which I was blind and indifferent. Just as we need "a spirit of...revelation (that is, illumination) in the knowledge of Christ, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened" (Eph 1:17-18), we need a parallel internal work to be sure that the Scriptures are indeed God's Word.

But how does the Spirit give this testimony? Does He speak to each of us immediately (i.e., without mediation)? The parallel between the assurance that Christ is our Savior and the assurance that Scripture is God's Word is helpful here. Just as "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3), it is also true that "No one can say 'Scripture is God's Word' except by the Spirit." Yes, in both cases we can utter the words, but we cannot be convinced and assured in our hearts.

But the parallel goes further yet. For the Spirit convinces us about Christ by taking what belongs to Him and showing it to us (John 16:14). Thus the Spirit works in such a way that it is who and what Christ Himself is that convinces us about Christ! The Spirit adds nothing to Christ; rather, through His ministry our eyes are opened to see who He really is.

In the same way, the testimony of the Spirit to Scripture does not add anything to Scripture. While distinct, it is not separable from Scripture. There is no voice whispering to us, "You can be sure the Bible is the Word of God." His testimony comes to us through the Scriptures which He Himself in-

spired, and thus their divine character becomes clear to us.

In this context it would be poor psychology as well as bad theology to think that we simply "decide" to believe that Scripture is God's Word written. For when the Spirit employs the Word to open our eyes to its divine authority we cannot but believe it. In this sense we are compelled by the Scriptures to believe in the Scriptures.

Abraham Kuyper, the multi-talented theologian who became Prime

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Minister of the Netherlands, was already a young minister before he experienced this himself. Here is his description of what happens:

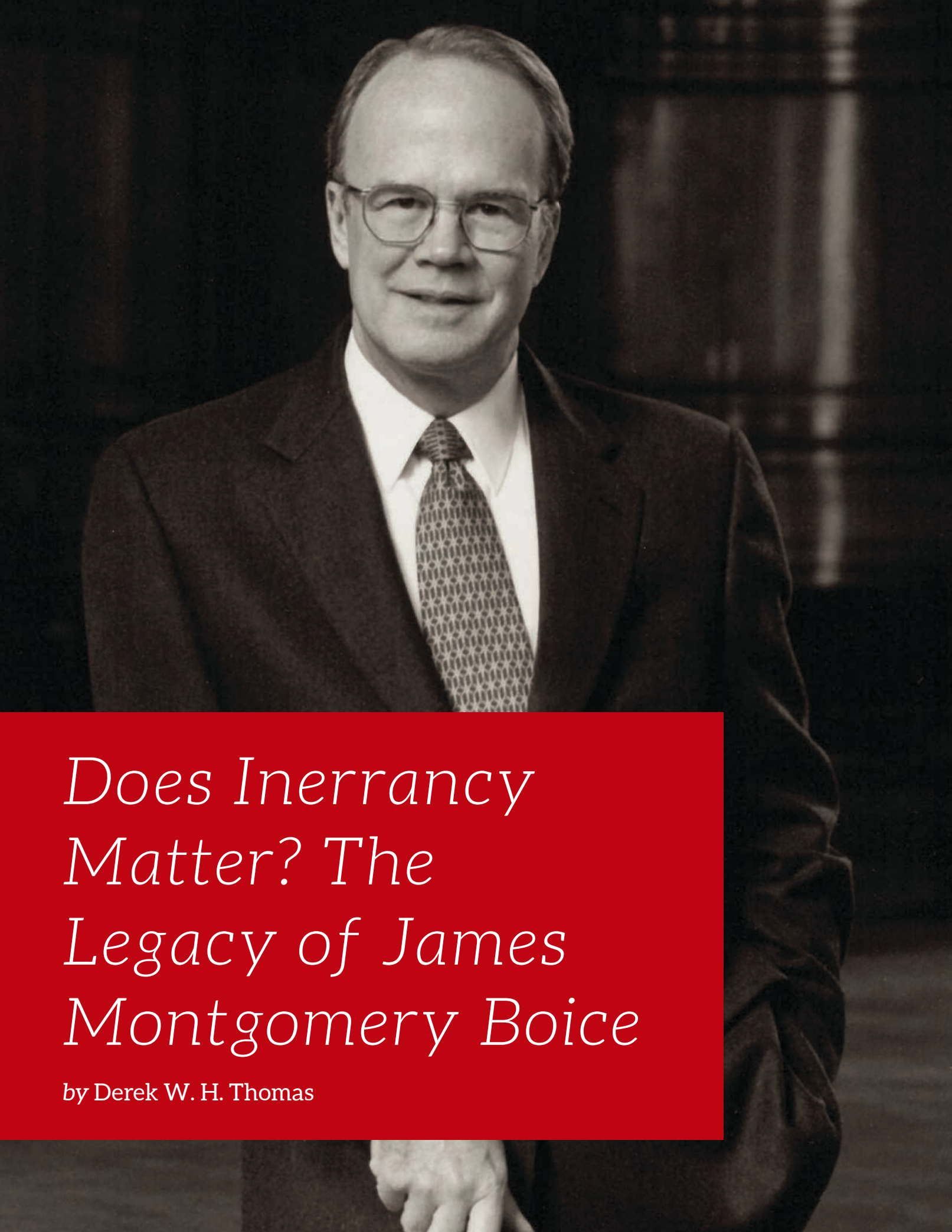
The veil is gradually pushed aside. The eye turns toward the Divine light that radiates from the Scripture, and now our inner ego sees the imposing superiority. We see it as one born blind, who being healed sees the beauty of colors, or as one deaf, whose hearing being restored,

catches the melodies from the world of sounds, and with his whole soul delights in them.

Among Rembrandt's best known works is his "Portrait of the Prophetess Anna Reading the Bible," for which his mother sat as the subject. One of the most impressive features of the painting is the way in which the Bible she is reading appears to be the source of the light by which she is reading it. This wonderfully (and deliberately) captures the point. The Spirit does not add to Scripture in order to persuade us of its divine origin and character. Nor does He speak apart from, or even alongside Scripture to bring us to this persuasion. He speaks through the Scriptures themselves. In its light we see light. Or, as John Calvin put it: "Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste."

This is why many Christians, when asked how they came to believe the Bible is the Word of God, simply say: "I was reading it (or hearing it preached) one day, and it all began to fall into place. The words came to me now with power and authority. I understood, and I trusted. Once I was blind—the Bible was a closed book to me. Now I see."

This is what happens when the Spirit who inspired Scripture through the prophets and apostles also bears witness to our spirits through those self-same Scriptures that they are the Word of God. We then bow in humble reverence, faith, and worship because we know we are hearing the living voice of God. ♦



*Does Inerrancy  
Matter? The  
Legacy of James  
Montgomery Boice*

by Derek W. H. Thomas

"If part of the Bible is true and part is not, who is to tell us what the true parts are? There are only two answers to that question. Either we must make the decision ourselves, in which case the truth becomes subjective. The thing that is true becomes merely what appeals to me. Or else, it is the scholar who tells us what we can believe and what we cannot believe... God has not left us either to our own whims or to the whims of scholars. He has given us a reliable book that we can read and understand ourselves."

**T**hese words, arguing the logic of an inerrant Scripture, were part of a sermon preached on May 23, 1993, by James Montgomery Boice. The sermon was preached on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his pastorate at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. Boice began by drawing attention to the fact that the doctrine of Scripture had been the most important thing that Tenth Presbyterian Church had stood for in its (then) one hundred sixty-four year existence.

At the close of 1977, ten years into his pastorate at Tenth, Dr. Boice helped in the foundation of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, and subsequently chaired it. A few years later, Boice published *Standing on the Rock: Upholding Biblical Authority in a Secular Age*, in which he answered the question, why does inerrancy matter? He noted that most of his contemporaries seemed more preoccupied with having a "personal relationship" with Jesus than addressing the doctrine of Scripture. But who is this Jesus with whom we are to have a personal relationship if not the Jesus accurately (inerrantly) portrayed in Scripture? We live in a relativistic age, Boice argued, where there is no such thing as truth, only "what's true for me."

When people operate on that basis, they usually think they have found freedom because, in not being tied to absolutes, they have freedom to do anything they wish. They are not tied to

God or to a God-given morality. They do not have to acknowledge any authority. But the consequence of this kind of freedom is that they are cast adrift on the sea of meaningless existence.

### **Absolute Truth**

Inerrancy is important, Boice argued, in a postmodern culture, to provide the individual with a basis for absolute authority in doctrine and morals. Without absolutism, we are adrift in a sea of relativism and subjectivism. Without a trustworthy Scripture, there is only a mere potentiality of meaning actualized differently in differing circumstances. We are trapped in the present, in our own historical circumstances, and cannot understand the past or have any certainty of the future. Truth lies in community and the voice of the Spirit—all subjective entities—wisps that appear for a moment, promising much and delivering little.

Ultimately, as Boice argued all too well, if there is no ultimate meaning, nothing I say makes any sense, including the words "there are no absolutes"! What Boice saw was that without inerrancy, the relevance of Christianity diminishes. Why should anyone commit their lives to the institution of the church if there is no certainty that what she stands for is true? Relativism as to truth leads to relativism as to behavior and commitment.

### **Authoritative Preaching**

What is preaching? It is either Truth delivered through personality as Phillips Brooks suggested, or it is the opin-

ion of men (and women). The steps from the original autographs to text, translation and meaning is a complex one, involving a commitment to providence as well as a rigorous hermeneutic and hence, the Council of Biblical Inerrancy also issued a statement, "Formal Rules of Biblical Interpretation": "It is only when ministers of the gospel hold to this high view of Scripture that they can preach with authority and effectively call sinful men and women to full faith in Christ."

Preachers have no right to meddle with the consciences of men and women unless what they say is based on a correct understanding of the written Word of God. "God alone is Lord of the conscience..." (Westminster Confession of Faith 20:2). The inerrancy of Scripture commits us in advance to an understanding that the Bible is God speaking (in the present tense). What Scripture says is what God says.

Preaching involves coming to grips with what the Bible is actually saying, breaking it down in order to put it together again, and applying to the mind, will and affections in today's context with today's issues and concerns sharpening the direction of application. Preachers can therefore say "Thus says the Lord" without suggesting that the preacher himself is infallible—he is not! Preachers are all too capable of shoddy preparation and misunderstanding. But when the Word is "rightly divided," the sermon reflects the true meaning of Scripture and therefore is authoritative.

Apart from a commitment to inerrancy, preaching drifts into personality

and popularity cults. Ministry becomes "skinny jeans and soul patches"—more about the preacher than about Scripture. Boice foresaw this trend toward celebratory ministry and vacuous preaching.

### True Reformation

Unless the Bible is true, "inerrant in the whole and in its parts," true reformation (of belief and practice) will not take place. Errant Scripture distorts the character of God and nature of Christian discipleship. Christians get preoc-

*Without a commitment to inerrancy, churches will flounder and die.*

cupied with peripheral and transient issues.

Boice saw clearly the need for Scripture to govern the life of the church in all of its details. Without a commitment to inerrancy, churches will flounder and die. But he also expressed a concern that inerrancy in itself was not the real issue facing the church at the end of the twentieth century. The real issue, he said, was the sufficiency of Scripture. It is all too easy to give lip service to inerrancy while also claiming that we need more than what we find in Scripture to address the complexities that we face today. Boice asked,

Do we really believe God has given us what we need in this book? Or do we think we have to supplement the Bible with other man-made things? Do we need sociological techniques to do evangelism? Must we attract people to our churches by showmanship and entertainment? Do we need psychology and psychiatry for Christian growth? Do

we need extra-biblical signs or miracles for guidance? Is the Bible adequate for achieving social progress and reform?

### The Sufficiency of Scripture

Dr. Boice came to understand that for all the value of the Council on Biblical Inerrancy and the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy that resulted from it, events have shown clearly that conservative Christians may affirm it and ignore it. It is not that Boice saw no place for extra-biblical data (he affirmed a doctrine of general revelation). General and special revelation are interdependent, but our understanding of what general revelation contributes cannot contradict what is expressly set

down in Scripture. When God prohibited Adam from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, He did not stop to explain what a "tree" was, or how to distinguish fruit from leaves. Adam already possessed that knowledge. The doctrine of Scripture's sufficiency does not rule out extra-biblical knowledge, but it does prioritize Scripture. And it is perhaps here that the issue of inerrancy has failed to address contemporary discussions and debates over creation, counseling and conversion, to name but three.

One of the concerns associated with the use of the term "inerrancy," Boice and others feared, was the gestalt surrounding the term that suggested a closed mind to all research and scholarly enterprise, committing interpreters in advance to absurd harmonization without regard for biblical genre, or an over-restrictive understanding of creation days. But perhaps we face the opposite—the tendency to disbelieve that the Bible has a discernible authoritative point of view—witness the numerous books entitled "Four Views

of X" and "Five Views of Y," imperceptibly suggesting an intentional and accommodating multiple-meaning point of view on the part of Scripture (the meaning of Scripture is "not manifold, but one"; cf. Westminster Confession of Faith 1:9).

### Chicago Affirmation

Thus, the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, in Articles XI and XII, affirms the following: "That Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses," and is therefore, "inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit."

The statement also denies "that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions" and "that biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history or science."

Along with Norman L. Geisler, J. I. Packer, R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, Carl F. H. Henry, Roger Nicole, and Francis Schaeffer, to name but a few of the participants in the ICBI, James Montgomery Boice was hugely influential in convincing a generation of evangelical leaders of the need for a robust defense of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. As Boice so aptly put it, "God has not left us either to our own whims . . . He has given us a reliable book that we can read and understand ourselves." We don't need to embrace the postmodern pessimism that says "that's just your interpretation." No, we can be assured that Scripture has a valid interpretation, for it comes (in its entirety) from the one God. For those things that are sure, those things that are of primary importance and which are clearly conveyed in Scripture, let's be willing to die. ♦



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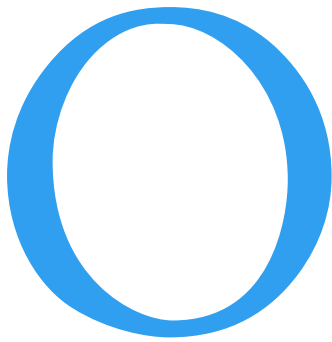
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# *For Such a Time as Then:*

*The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*

by Stephen J. Nichols



On June 21, 1977, Billy Graham sent a \$10,000 gift, with explicit instructions that it be itemized "as an anonymous gift," to a group of scholars who had just formed a new organization committed to writing a statement on the inerrancy of the Bible. Why such a significant, at that time, donation?

And why did this group of scholars organize in the first place? The new organization would come to be known as the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. And it was formed with a pinpoint focus on a pinpoint need: Scripture had come under attack within theologically conservative seminaries, denominations, and other Christian institutions.

The ICBI did not form for the interests of scholarly amusement. The ICBI was forged on the anvil of a significant crisis in the church.

Of course, such councils are not unique to the twentieth-century church. From the beginnings of the church, there have been challenges within and without. To address these challenges, theologians (in many of the prior centuries of the church these folks were called "Doctors" of the church) and churchmen drafted creeds, confessions, catechisms, and statements. These documents mark off boundaries on theological issues. They provide guardrails to keep the church on track. And of course, these councils do not occur in a vacuum. There's always a context. So we need to understand the context of the ICBI and of the statement it produced, the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978).

You could easily make a case that the inerrancy crisis stretches all the way back to the Garden of Eden. The serpent's words in Genesis 3:1 drive this point home: "Indeed, has God said?" And the challenge to God's Word rolls

on from one generation to the next. The challenge, however, does seem to take on a vengeance as we move into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is true that there is nothing new under the sun; but it is equally true that challenges take on the unique flavor and trappings of their cultural context. So it is with the doctrine of Scripture's authority and the doctrine of inerrancy in the modern age.

### **The Doctrine of Inerrancy in the Modern Age: The Context of the Chicago Statement**

The first wave of this controversy regarding the inerrancy of Scripture hit in the 1880s with Charles Augustus Briggs in America and the issues leading to the formation of the Bible League in the United Kingdom in the early 1890s. The next wave came in the 1920s and 1930s and the fundamentalist and modernist controversy—which was also a transatlantic phenomena. Then we come forward one more generation to the 1960s and 1970s.

In 1961, Ralph H. Elliott, a professor of Old Testament in one of

the five seminaries under the auspices of the Southern Baptist Convention, published a commentary on Genesis casting aspersion on Moses' authorship of the Pentateuch and the historicity of the creation account, all the while employing the methods of higher criticism. This was the first domino to fall, and soon other denominations and other seminaries followed suit and fell, too.

To speak to this crisis, a group of scholars convened on the campus of Gordon Theological Seminary in the summer of 1966. They called it a "Seminar on the Authority of Scripture," also known as the Wenham Conference on the Authority of Scripture. The scholars gathered there were unable to arrive at a consensus. This revealed some divisions within conservative evangelical scholarship on the issue of inerrancy and even underscored the need to form a consensus among the theological conservatives.

Sensing this crisis rather poignantly, having been subjected to attacks on the Bible by his own seminary professors and seeing the attacks ricochet around

his home denomination, the Presbyterian Church USA, R. C. Sproul drafted the Ligonier Statement [on Scripture] in 1973, so named for his Ligonier Valley Study Center established in western Pennsylvania. Concise and clear, the Ligonier Statement flatly rejects "any view which imputes to [the Scriptures] a lesser degree of inerrancy than total."

And in 1976, Harold Lindsell published his *Battle for the Bible*. If this were a play, we could say that the stage was now set and the players were ready. And our play would take place in Chicago, spanning October 25-28, 1978.

The ICBI, with leadership from R. C. Sproul, J. I. Packer, James Montgomery Boice, and others, presented to the over 300 scholars, pastors, and evangelical leaders in attendance—among them John MacArthur, Sr. and John MacArthur, Jr.—a statement with five

getting over three hundred evangelical leaders to agree on a detailed theological statement is a twentieth-century miracle.

### **The Content of the Chicago Statement: Unmitigated Inerrancy**

One of the crucial cultural issues that makes the doctrine of inerrancy so difficult for moderns (and we could say in our own context, postmoderns) is the issue of submission. In the preface to the Chicago Statement, the second sentence expresses, "Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God's written Word." This opening posture is important. It reminds us of one of the salient phrases of Benjamin Warfield, one of the key

Chicago Statement offers the church a nuanced and thoughtful exposition of this foundational tenet.

From this opening posture of submission and humility, the Chicago Statement proceeds to offer a full definition and affirmation of inerrancy. The genius of Chicago may very well be found in its Articles of Affirmation and Denial. It is one thing to sign a statement of inerrancy, all the while thinking that one can ascribe his own meaning to it or to its application. The Articles of Affirmation and Denial close the loopholes; they exclude wiggle room. It seems every statement or creed or confession is liable to what they called in olden days "latitudinarianism," which means subscribers to these documents would have latitude in their commitment to the content of these documents. The Articles of Affirmation and Denial serve to exclude such latitude.

### **The Final Article**

The final Article deserves notice. It reads, "We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ." The Denial, which concludes the Statement, reads: "We further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the church."

So, we are reminded of the importance of inerrancy. It connects with other doctrines, serving as an essential hub for other doctrines. Inerrancy also reaches out to impact our lives and godliness. There are grave consequences for abandoning it. There are also welcome consequences for affirming it. Inerrancy is not only the truly biblically-consistent view of how to view the Bible, it also is a helpful guardrail to keep both the individual and the church on track. Inerrancy leads us to

"We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ."

propositions and nineteen articles of affirmation and denial. The Chicago Statement also included a preface and an exposition of approximately three-and-a-half pages. This large group represented scholars across the denominations and from multifold theological perspectives, yet they signed their names to this substantive and complex, and rather detailed, theological statement. If we allow a loose use of the word "miracle," we could handily say

defenders of the doctrine of Scripture in the modern age. Warfield would tell us students often, "Gentlemen, I love the supernatural." If the Bible is God's Word, if it is supernatural, from Him (inspiration), then of course it has authority, of course it is true (inerrancy), and, of course, our only response is full submission to it. We submit to the text; we do not submit the text to us. As Martin Luther once said, "When the Bible speaks, God speaks." The

affirm the full authority of Scripture in all of its teaching—that is the best way to ensure that we are walking in humble submission to all of Scripture's teachings. Inerrancy leads to obedience.

After the gathering in Chicago in October of 1978, many more signatures poured in to the offices of the ICBI. The leadership of ICBI established a ten-year program of producing books and pamphlets, hosting conferences and summits, and dispatching its best teachers to churches. All these efforts were to fortify the church on her stand on inerrancy in light of the crisis so real and so urgent. And the result of all these efforts?

### The Impact of the Chicago Statement

Perhaps we could go back to the 1961 publication of Professor Elliott's book and the brewing of this controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention. These instances in the 1960s turned out to be but meager beginnings. Throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, theological liberals were on the ascendency in the SBC. But in the 1980s, the conservatives would take back their denomination. This story is well chronicled. What we need to remember is the role of the Chicago Statement. No doubt, this statement buoyed the efforts of the theological conservatives. The leadership of the theological conservatives were part of the inner circle of the Chicago Statement and many were signatories to it. The Chicago Statement gave them a place to stand, and also reminded them that they did not stand alone.

The Chicago Statement sustained an entire generation in confronting foes both within and without the church on the bedrock and crucial doctrine of inerrancy. The challenges present in the 1970s only intensified in the following decades. The Chicago Statement offered a rallying point for the theological conservatives' efforts.



Original signing of the Chicago Statement (1978)

We can think of this in terms of the pulpit ministry. What does a preacher have to preach, except the exposition of the authoritative Word of God? If one steps into the pulpit with suspicions about the Bible's full and total truthfulness, or with reservations, what does the preacher have to stand on? The Chicago Statement provided a theological framework for one to have confidence in Scripture.

### The Chicago Statement Today?

While the creeds and councils are part of the church's heritage and tradition, they do not serve as a remedy to future error, equivocation, and theological drift. To put this another way, the Chicago Statement served to sustain a generation. But there is a new generation, and what are the challenges facing it? In many ways these are the same challenges that faced the leadership of ICBI in the 1970s. The arguments against inerrancy, or a mitigated inerrancy, are the same. They may have some trappings unique to contemporary contexts, but the substance of the arguments are the same.

Historian and writer David MacCullough once said that history does not repeat itself, it echoes. So while the challenges to inerrancy tragically continue to echo through the church—as

they have done since the Garden—so too the echoes of theological orthodoxy may be heard.

The church in the 2010s is the next generation after the Chicago Statement, the second generation after the fundamentalist/modernist controversy, and the third generation after the likes of Spurgeon and Warfield had their battles for the Bible. Warfield and Spurgeon trained and preached to an entire generation, equipping them for these challenges. J. Gresham Machen trained a whole generation of pastors and theologians from his post first at Princeton and then at Westminster Theological Seminary, which he founded in 1929. Sproul, Packer, Boice, and many others trained and preached to an entire generation—and continue to do so. So that brings us to our moment, and to our challenge.

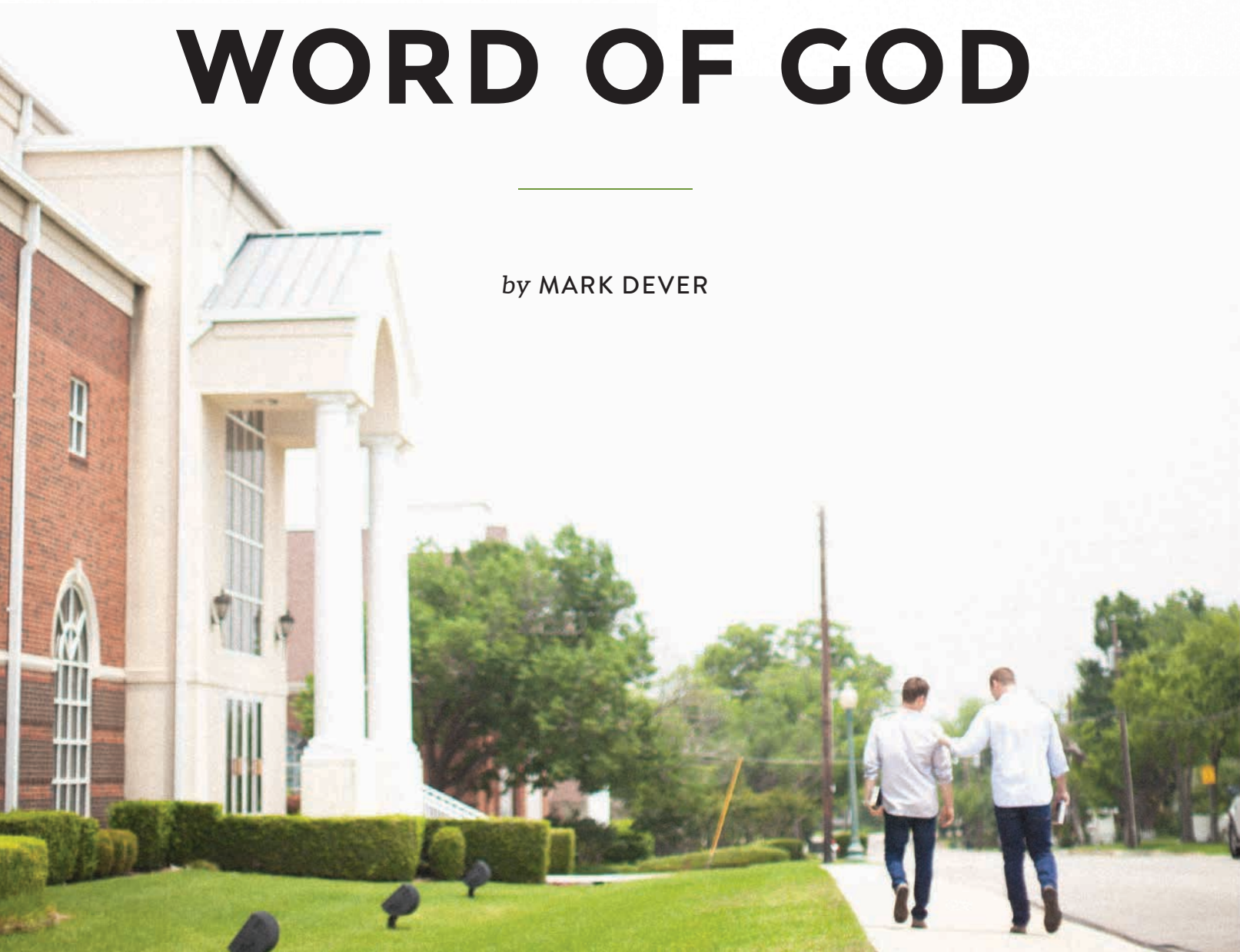
We must remember the words of the Chicago Statement, that one cannot reject inerrancy without grave consequences. Think of the grave consequences of pulpit ministries built on something less than a full-throated commitment to inerrancy. Now, think of pulpit ministries solidly built on and dedicated to inerrancy. The next generation is waiting for the answer. ♦

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The  
**CENTRALITY**  
*of the*  
**WORD OF GOD**

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by MARK DEVER



**T**he idea behind thinking that preaching should always (or almost always) be expositional is that preaching is to have the Word at its center, and to have the Word directing it. In fact, each and every church should have the Word at its center, and should have the Word directing it. And this is because when we read the Scriptures, we see clearly that God has decided to use His Word to bring life. His Word is His own chosen instrument.

I remember being at a reception in Washington, D.C., when the conversation turned to a recently published book. I had read it because I was about to speak on the topic of the book elsewhere. My friend standing there had read it, too, because he had just written a review of it. I asked him what he thought. "Oh, it was very good," he said, "except it was marred by the author's repeating of that old Protestant error that the Bible created the church, when we all know," my Roman Catholic friend said with assurance, "that the church created the Bible." Well, I was in a quandary. What should I say? It was his party, not mine. But I decided that if he could be so openly dismissive, then I could be as forthright and honest as I wished. "That's ridiculous," I said, trying to sound as pleasantly contradictory as I could. "God's people have never created God's Word! From the very beginning, God's Word has created His people. From Genesis 1 where God literally creates all that is by His Word, including His people, to Genesis 12 where He calls Abram out of Ur by the Word of His promise, to Ezekiel 37 where God gives Ezekiel a vision to share with the Israelite exiles in Babylon about a great resurrection to life that will come about by God's Word, to John 1 where we read of the supreme coming of God's Word in Jesus Christ, His Word made flesh, to Romans 10 where we read that faith and spiritual life come by the Word,

God has always created His people by His Word. It has never been the other way around! God's people have never created His Word." I cannot remember what happened in the rest of that conversation, but it solidified my own understanding of the absolute centrality of the Word. And it would be helpful to follow this path through Scripture and see what it tells us about the centrality of God's Word in our lives, and then conclude by considering what this means for the nature of preaching and for the importance of this preaching in our churches.

### **The Role of the Word in Bringing Life**

We should begin where the Bible does—in Genesis 1. If you read the chapter, you see that it was by His Word that God created the world and all the life in it. He spoke and it was so! In Genesis 3 we read of the Fall. When our first parents sinned, they were cast out of the presence of God. They lost sight of God. But in God's great grace, they did not lose all hope. Though God was vanishing from their sight, He mercifully sent His voice to them. And His Word came to them, and so His Word was the germ of their hope. When God cursed the serpent, He warned him that the offspring of the woman would crush him. It was by God's Word that Abram was called out of Ur of the Chaldees. This Word of God's promise recorded in the first few verses of Genesis 12 was used by God to call Abram out of Ur to follow God. And so God's people were created by God's Word. Abram never set up a committee to craft God's Word. No! He was made the father of God's people because God's Word came specially to him. We know the story of how the children of Abraham multiplied in the promised land, and then went down into Egypt, eventually falling into slavery there for centuries. And just when that bondage looked permanent, what did God do? He sent His Word. God's

Word called out to Moses, initiating His redemptive work (Ex 3:4). It was by God's Word that Moses was called. And God's Word came not just to call Moses and his descendants, but the whole nation of Israel to be His people. Similarly, in Exodus 20, God gave His law to His people. And by their acceptance of it they were made His people, so that it was by God's Word that Israel was constituted God's special people.

As we progress through the Old Testament we see that God's Word plays a pivotal role. This is illustrated in the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 18. "The word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, 'Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the face of the earth'" (v. 1). How many hundreds of times in the Old Testament do we read the phrase "the word of the LORD came"? It is typical of God's activity in the Old Testament as He created and led His people by His Word. God's Word always came as the means of faith in the Old Testament; you could even say it was a secondary object. God is always the primary object of our faith. But in another sense, His Word or His promise is to be trusted, with all of the faith that we would invest in His person.

### **Why the Word Is Central**

Do you understand why the Word of God is central? Do you grasp why it is the instrument that creates faith? It is because the Word of the Lord presents the object of our faith to us; it holds out God's promise to us, from all kinds of individual promises (throughout the Old Testament and New Testament) all the way to the great promise, the great hope, the great object of our faith, Christ Himself. The Word presents that which is to be believed. (It's almost as if, for the Christian, the speed of sound is greater than the speed of light. News of the future reaches our ears before it reaches our eyes.)

One of the climactic chapters in the Bible shows God using the Word to

## Do you understand why the Word of God is central? Do you grasp why it is the instrument that creates faith?

bring life. In this great vision we see most vividly that life comes by the Word of God. The remarkable vision is described in the first 10 verses of Ezekiel 37. In verse 11, God interprets this vision for Ezekiel. He says that these dry bones stand for the whole house of Israel who say "our hope has perished." What a moving presentation! God poignantly represents as death their own hopelessness and despair. And His answer to the people, as it was to the dry bones, is that, "I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life" (v. 14). How does He do this? He does it by His Word.

In this vision, He does not do what we would do if we were trying to author a credible vision—make the army live so that they could listen, and then have Ezekiel prophesy to them. No! He has Ezekiel speak His Word to them while they are dead, and as he does they come to life!

This is an arresting picture particularly because it is analogous to the way God had called Ezekiel to speak to a people that would not listen. God Himself had spoken into the void and by the power of His Word created all things. His Word also came into the world, as John says in his gospel, "and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him" (John 1:10). And by that Word, the Lord Jesus, God has begun creating His new society on earth. In the same way, God told Ezekiel to speak to these dried bones.

### An Inseparable Connection

An inseparable connection exists between life, breath, spirit, speech, and word. This connection is evident in Mark's gospel account (Mark 7:32-35), when "they brought to Him one who was deaf... looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, "Be opened!" And his ears were opened...." Jesus spoke to a deaf man, and life came back into his ears! In the ministry of Jesus, we see Jesus calling out His people to Himself, in just the way that Ezekiel prophesied: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek 36:26-27). This is the glorious reality that we Christians have experienced. As I said to a Jehovah's Witness some years ago, we Christians know that in and of ourselves we are spiritually dead, and that we need God to initiate His life-giving love to us through His Word, and to reach down and to rip out our old stony hearts and to put in us a new heart of flesh, a heart of love that is soft and supple, pliant to His Word. And that is precisely what Jesus Christ does! He is creating a different kind of people, a people who show God is life in them.

This brings us to that supreme picture of the Word of God bringing life. In John 1:1-4 we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing

came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men." Supremely, the Word of God has come in Christ. It is in Christ that the Word of God has fully and finally come to us.

### The Centrality of the Word

Jesus modeled the centrality of the Word in His own ministry. In Mark 1:38, when His disciples came seeking Him, telling

Him that many people were looking for Him so that He could do miracles and heal them, "Jesus replied, 'Let us go somewhere else . . . so that I may preach there also; for that is what I have come for.'" Now, if you keep reading in Mark's gospel, you see that Jesus knew that He had come fundamentally to lay down His life as a ransom for many (10:45), but in order for that sacrifice to be understood, He must first teach.

God's pattern with us is unwavering. As you read through the Bible, it is clear that God acts and then God interprets. He does not only speak (though I am not sure one could even conceive of "only speaking" in reference to God); rather, God acts, but then He does not leave His acts sitting there to speak for themselves, if you will. No, He then speaks to interpret His great saving acts.

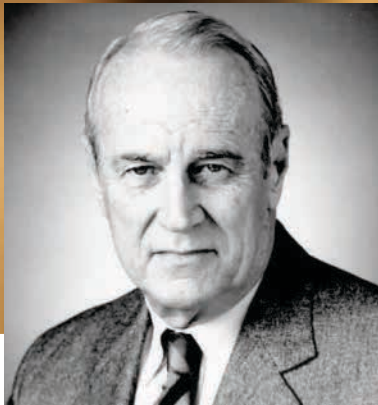
We have separated ourselves from God by our sin; therefore, God must speak if we are to know Him. This is why the work of Carl F. H. Henry has been so important. In his great work *God, Revelation and Authority*, Dr. Henry makes just this point—that it is God who must reveal Himself, because we, on our own, due to our sin, could never know Him otherwise. Either He has spoken, or we are forever lost in the darkness of our own speculations. ♦



# THE EXPOSITORY PREACHING OF DR. S. LEWIS JOHNSON, JR.

*"Through the years I have listened  
to the teachings of S. Lewis Johnson  
far more than any other preacher."*

**JOHN MACARTHUR**



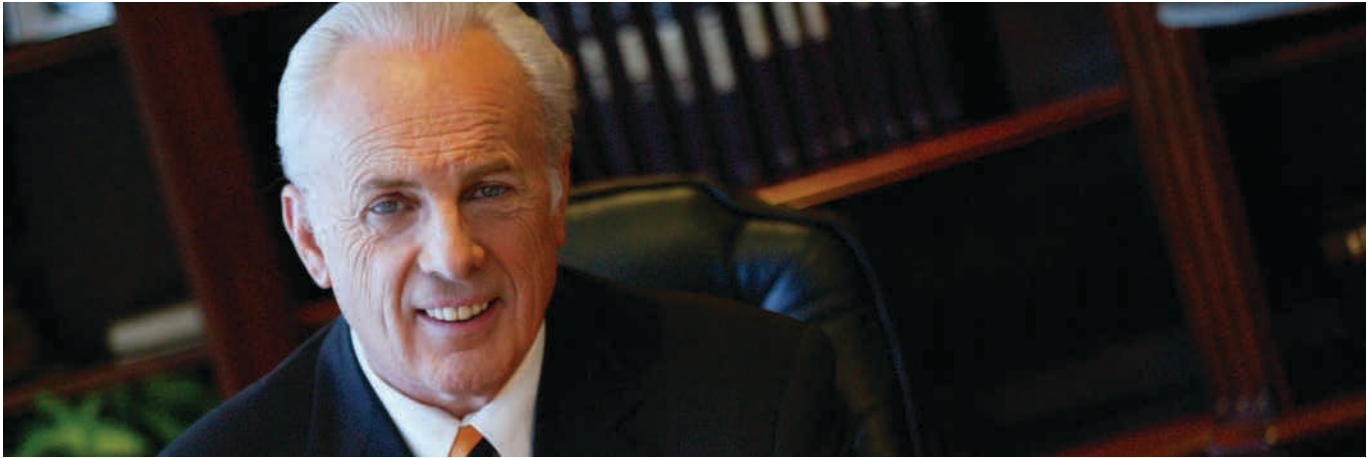
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# BIBLICAL INERRANCY & THE PULPIT

with JOHN MACARTHUR



## Why is it important to you to dedicate the 2015 Shepherd's Conference Summit to the theme of inerrancy?

Generally, I've dedicated the conference to this theme because the inerrancy of Scripture is the foundation for absolutely everything regarding God's revelation, the understanding and proclamation of the truth. Every single generation of ministers—every generation of Christians—needs to have confidence in and be able to defend the inspiration, inerrancy and authority of Scripture. Nothing is more important. I've often said divine truth is the most important thing in the world because by it, we come to know God and receive eternal life.

More specifically, it was October 1978 when the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy was produced. Since that time, a whole generation has come and gone. We're starting to see on the horizon, despite the profound influence of the Chicago Statement, a renewed assault on inerrancy and the authority of Scripture. We can't give up the absolute truthfulness of Scripture. Now is the time to take our stand. This new generation hasn't yet fought this battle, and it's their time to step up, affirm, declare, explain and defend the inerrancy of Scripture.

## What do you hope to achieve as a result of this landmark conference?

I want to raise the subject of inerrancy higher than it's been raised in the last 30 years. I want to push it to the very forefront of evangelical thinking and discussion, and hopefully even writing. There hasn't been any widespread, significant

discussion on the topic, and while we affirm it and we may assume it, it's still under assault. I hope the conference will raise the issue to a place it's not been recently, and then, having raised it, that faithful men will support and clarify the doctrine of inerrancy for this generation.

I also want to present and defend the doctrine on a widespread level beyond me, beyond Grace Church, and pull together the best, brightest and most dedicated scholars in the evangelical world. We want to form a front of solidarity on this issue. We want to close the ranks with anyone willing to take a stand on this. We want to make anybody who diminishes this doctrine feel like they are outsiders who have broken ranks with the faithful.

Finally, I want to present The Master's Seminary as an institution that is passionately and relentlessly committed to biblical inerrancy. I want students around the globe to know that they can come to our seminary and be assured that every person in every classroom is going to uphold the inerrancy of Scripture. This seminary is a place where students will never come out of a class questioning the integrity or authority of Scripture; they're going to learn what it means and how to preach it.

## Who have been the greatest influences in your life? Who has solidified your commitment to biblical authority?

The first influence for me was my own father, Dr. John MacArthur—they called him Jack. He preached the Word of God from the time he graduated from seminary until he

was 91 years old and went to be with the Lord. His love was apologetics—defending the faith—and his particular interest was to defend the authority of Scripture. I grew up with a father who sought out every means to proclaim and defend the authority and inerrancy of Scripture.

The second great influence in my life was Dr. Charles Feinberg, who was the Dean of Talbot Seminary when I attended. He is the reason I went to Talbot. He had studied fourteen years to be a rabbi before conversion to Christ. He was a brilliant man. He had a Th.D. from Dallas Seminary followed by a Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins in Biblical Archeology under William Foxwell Albright, who was the most outstanding archaeologist of his day.

Feinberg, as brilliant as he was, never questioned anything in Scripture. In fact, he defended Scripture, not so much from the apologetic standpoint, as my dad did, but from an internal perspective. Whereas my dad would look at things and maybe come at it more from an external level, Feinberg unpacked the Scripture to demonstrate its own truthfulness. I took every class he offered in seminary, I read everything he wrote, and he had a great influence on my life.

During my seminary days, I also read B. B. Warfield's *Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* and started pulling things together. Graduating from seminary in 1964, I was faced immediately with liberal attacks on biblical authority. They were everywhere and there were many conservative schools that were caving in and capitulating to the school of higher criticism that assaulted Scripture. In light of those attacks, I trained through my seminary days to be a defender of Scripture. Once I was on that path and was committed to expositing the Scripture, I tested my understanding of inerrancy in every passage in the Bible. I've gone through every passage in the Bible—writing the *MacArthur Study Bible* notes, preaching my way through the whole New Testament, writing commentaries—and the greatest evidence for the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture is the Scripture itself. It stands the test of the most rigorous scrutiny. After five decades in ministry, I have a stronger view of Scripture's inerrancy now than I've ever had.

### **What is the connection between biblical inerrancy and expository preaching?**

The connection between biblical inerrancy and expository preaching is an obvious one. If every word of Scripture is true—and it is—then every word of Scripture is divine revelation. It's part of the whole council of God, and if you believe in an inerrant Scripture, then you have to be an expositor. To say it another way, I've never heard of a Bible expositor who didn't believe in the inerrancy of Scripture.

Why in the world would you explain the meaning of Scripture if you didn't believe it was inerrant? If you didn't believe it was absolutely, unequivocally true? And if every word of

God is pure, as it says it is, like silver fired in a furnace seven times, if as Jesus said in John 10:35, Scripture cannot be annulled, it can't be destroyed, it can't be set aside, then you are bound to the responsibility to exposit Scripture. No matter how you look at that, the fruit of inerrancy is exposition.

Indeed, in that text in John 10:35 when Jesus says Scripture cannot be broken, He's saying that because He quotes from Psalm 82:6. His whole argument turns on one word in the Psalm, and it's at that moment that He says Scripture cannot be broken. Not even one word can be annulled. He makes His case off one word. So if, as I say, Scripture is absolutely inerrant, then you have no choice but to proclaim it. To use a little motto we have at Grace to You, you have to unleash God's truth one verse at a time.

### **What are your concerns for the church in this present hour as it relates to inerrancy?**

First of all, on a general level, the church is undiscerning. If so-called Christians had any discernment, I'm afraid that a whole lot of what's going on in the church would have to stop. The inability to discern is the final problem. It's like having spiritual AIDS. You can die of a thousand diseases because your immune system doesn't function. The church can perish at the hands of a thousand heresies because it can't discern, and the only way you can discern is to have the truth by which everything is measured, and that's Scripture. If you equivocate on whether the Scripture is true or not, then you are hopelessly removed from discernment because you're hopelessly removed from the truth.

My concern is that the church is awash in sentimentalism, superficiality, entertainment, and feel-good experiences instead of sound doctrine based upon an understanding and a belief in the inerrancy of Scripture. Those are the things that produce the ability to discern and protect the church from the damage that error can do.

### **As you look back over a half-century of ministry, how has a strong belief in inerrancy affected your preaching and pastoral ministry?**

The greatest motivation that I have for preaching the Word of God is my belief in inerrancy. If I for one minute thought that some of Scripture might not be true, it would make me silent. Because I believe the Word of God is true, I am liberated to preach. I am set free to proclaim it with conviction and passion. If I had any questions about that, I couldn't be an expositor. I suppose I could give people some insights and some general advice, but I'm not interested in that. If I can't say "thus says the Lord," if I can't say "the Bible says and therefore God says," then I can't preach and I can't lead the church.

Recently there were a couple articles I read in which the idea was presented that preachers have to stop saying "the



Bible says." How frightening is that? It doesn't help to "suggest," or to say, "well, Paul said" or "John said." You mean to tell me that implicitly somebody named John or somebody named Paul has more influence and clout than the Bible? I really do believe in our culture today that there is still some residual belief that the Bible is a defined book. More than ever we need to say, "the Bible says," "the Bible says," "the Bible says." If I can't say that and accurately proclaim what the Bible says, then I can't preach. So that is the foundation of everything.

Furthermore, the Bible presents truth in rational ways through systematic argument—normal language, normal conversation, normal processes of thinking, cause and effect. If I can't follow the Bible as it makes a case for the truth, then I have no authority. My own reasoning, insights, sentimentality, emotional ideas, or cleverness do not have any innate authority. The only thing that has divine authority is the Bible, and not just isolated ideas in the Bible, but the flow of it, the arguments that it makes on every page that yield propositional doctrine for which we are responsible.

**As the President of The Master's Seminary, how do you see your future role in training men to be biblical expositors who are committed to the inerrancy of Scripture?**

I want to model biblical exposition that yields theology and sound doctrine. I want to model that as the President of The Master's Seminary.

Second, I want to gather together the finest biblical scholars who can train men to do that, who can train them in the original languages, train them in systematic theology, biblical theology, and show them the models and the anti-models of church history. In other words, I want to assemble the finest, most dedicated scholars who believe in the inerrancy of Scripture, who believe consistently in a unified view of theology, and who want to train men to preach and teach effectively.

Third, I want to gather the finest, brightest, best and most devoted men to train. I'm not trying to produce people who can talk or philosophize about theology; I want to produce men who want to effectively preach and teach the Bible. At the end of the day I recognize that this starts with me. Producing these kinds of men means modeling exposition, a life of exposition in a church located on the same campus. Every single week this happens at the seminary, not just by me, but by the other men who preach and teach the Word. This endeavor also means developing and supporting a faculty and library without equal to provide the resources for that training, and then drawing together the very best students.

Finally, I want to gather churches here and around the world who look to our seminary to provide them with their pastors and their leaders and partner with those churches.

**What are the challenges that pastors who are committed to biblical authority face today?**

There are challenges facing men committed to Biblical inerrancy, but they have nothing to do with the text, really. That's unassailable. So the good news is—this is really good news—the subject is not elusive. The subject is all contained in one book. It can't get simpler than that. As John Piper said some years ago, we are brokers of one book. Everything that we are to proclaim and teach is in one book. It's all true. It's without error, and that kind of clarity, that kind of simplicity, is a tremendous starting point.

So what are the challenges then? The challenges are not in trying to find the truth. It's there. We have it in our hands. The challenges come in getting the best education so that you can accurately handle the Word of truth, and so that you don't need to be a workman who's ashamed. The challenges are diligence. The challenges have to do with personal discipline to do the hard work.

One of the reasons that there is such poor preaching is that men aren't willing to do the work that turns their sermons into great preaching. The challenges are to overcome laziness, weariness, distractions, your own failures, and your own weakness. The truth is there. The power of the Holy Spirit is there in the life of the minister and through his preaching if he will be faithful to discipline himself to godliness.

There are going to be challenges in the culture because our message is increasingly unpopular. We know that, but again, we're warriors. We're soldiers. We obey our commander. We go to battle. We get wounded. Some of the troops even die, but we're called as stewards to be found faithful. ⚡

# WILLIAM TYNDALE: THE FATHER OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE, PT. 1

by STEVEN J. LAWSON



**I**n the sixteenth century, one heroic figure so mastered the English language, mobilizing and sending it into the world for the cause of Jesus Christ, that his global influence extends to this present day. By first translating the Bible from the Hebrew and Greek into English, William Tyndale became the "true father of the English Bible." In so doing, Tyndale, equally, became the father of the English Reformation as well as the father of the modern English language. It was this monumental task, rendering the Bible from its original tongue into English, which gave rise to the Protestant movement in England and the standardizing of modern English. Simply put, Tyndale birthed the English Reformation by giving its people a pure translation of Scripture in their native tongue.

Tyndale was the pioneer who blazed the trail for the Reformation in his homeland. Noted Reformation historian J. H. Merle d'Aubigne calls Tyndale "the mighty mainspring of the English Reformation." That is to say, Tyndale set into motion the leading cause, which, in turn, produced powerful effects in the spread of the Reformation throughout England and beyond. Preeminent among Bible translators, Tyndale possessed "a linguistic genius whose expertise in multiple languages dazzled the scholarly world of his day." According to Tyndale biographer Brian Edwards, Tyndale was "the heart of the

Reformation in England." In fact, Edwards further exclaims, Tyndale "was the Reformation in England."

These respected men are not alone in their accolades for Tyndale. The famous martyrologist, John Foxe, lauded Tyndale as "the Apostle of England...the most remarkable figure among the first generation of English Protestants." Through his translation work, Tyndale is regarded as "the first of the Puritans, or at least their grandfather." Assuming this mantle, Tyndale became the driving force that reshaped and reconfigured the English language. Translating the Bible into English for the common person, Tyndale is celebrated as the "prophet of the English language." Tyndale took supreme command of the Hebrew and Greek Bible and placed it into the hands of ordinary people in a readable English Bible.

With such extreme importance attached to Tyndale, certain questions need to be addressed in order to fully appreciate his place in the broader scope of church history. What steps did this chief architect of the English Bible take in order to produce his magnificent translation from the original languages? What challenges did he have to overcome in order to present this extraordinary gift to the English-speaking world? What high price did Tyndale ultimately pay in order to accomplish this extraordinary feat?

### Born near Gloucestershire

William Tyndale was born in the early 1490s, probably between 1493 and 1495, most likely in 1494. This placed him in rural western England, the Slymbridge area of Gloucestershire near the Welsh border and Severn River. During the War of the Roses, Tyndale's ancestors migrated to the Gloucestershire area in the fifteenth century and became landowners. He was placed by God into an industrious family of respectable farmers who made their livelihood by cultivating their land. The Tyndale family was reasonably successful, flourishing in one of the most prosperous countries in England. This relative prosperity allowed William's parents to send him to Oxford, England's most prestigious university.

Little is known about William's younger years, which remain shrouded in obscurity. What is known, however, is that Tyndale had at least two brothers, Edward and John. Like their father, his brother John became an able and successful land manager who oversaw their Gloucestershire farm. The other brother, Edward, became a crown steward in Gloucestershire, who received rent for the use of Berkeley land for the king. In future years, William would exert a direct influence upon his brothers for the cause of the Reformation in England. As a result, John would be fined for possessing and distributing Bibles, a serious crime at the time in England. Upon his death, Edward would leave a number of Reformed books in his last will and testament, a punishable offense in England.

### Magdalen Hall and Oxford

In 1506, at age twelve, William entered Magdalen Hall, which was located inside Magdalen College and attached to Oxford University. He spent a total of ten years, 1506 to 1516, at Oxford in study. In Magdalen Hall, Tyndale spent the first two years in the equivalent of a preparatory grammar school. There he studied grammar, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music, theory, rhetoric, logic, and philosophy. Upon entering Oxford, he demonstrated great aptitude and progress in languages under the finest classical scholars. While there, Tyndale was ordained into the priesthood, though he never entered a monastic order.

After graduating with his Bachelor of Arts on July 4, 1512, Tyndale set his sights on a Master of Arts degree from Oxford. It was not until the late stage of his education, after eight or nine years, that he finally was allowed to study theology. However, it was only speculative theology, with priority given to Aristotle and other Greek philosophers rather than the Bible. Upon reflection, Tyndale expressed his great disappointment in being shielded from the Bible and theology:

In the universities, they have ordained that no man shall look on the Scripture until he be noselled [nursed] in heathen learning eight or nine years, and armed with false principles with which he is clean shut out of the

understanding of the Scripture. . . . [T]he Scripture is locked up with . . . false expositions, and with false principles of natural philosophy.

Such a spiritually impoverished education hindered Tyndale from knowing the truth of Scripture. In July 1515, Tyndale graduated with a Master of Arts degree as a university-trained linguist from the highly acclaimed Oxford University. Upon graduation, little is known regarding what Tyndale chose to do immediately afterward. There is consensus that he likely pursued further studies at Oxford and gave classroom instruction there.

### Cambridge and the White Horse Inn

In 1519, Tyndale went to study at Cambridge, regarded as Oxford's foremost intellectual rival in England. Scholars suggest that he may have received a degree while there. Prior to Tyndale's arrival at Cambridge, from 1511 to 1514, the famed Dutch Renaissance humanist, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536), lectured in Greek at Cambridge. During Tyndale's time there, Erasmus was traveling around Europe, compiling his famous Greek New Testament (1516).

Cambridge had become a hotbed for the Protestant teaching of the German Reformer, Martin Luther. Many of Luther's works were accessible at Cambridge, being broadly circulated among instructors and students alike. This exposure generated a building excitement on campus as these new reformational truths were captivating many brilliant minds. As such, Cambridge was becoming the training ground for future reformers and martyrs. Under this influence of the Bible, Tyndale embraced a deep commitment to the core truths of the Protestant movement.

In 1520, a small group of Cambridge scholars began meeting regularly to discuss this new theology. A mere three years earlier, Luther had posted his 95 Theses in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517. These truth-seeking students gathered at a local pub on the campus of King's College, called the White Horse Inn, to debate the ideas of Luther. This group became known as "little Germany." In this small circle were many future leaders in the Reformed movement in England. Those included were Robert Barnes, Nicholas Ridley, Hugh Latimer, Miles Coverdale, Thomas Cranmer, Thomas Bilney, and many believe, William Tyndale. Of this group, two became archbishops, seven became bishops, and eight would be Protestant martyrs—Bilney, Tyndale, Clark, Frith, Lambert, Barnes, Ridley, and Latimer. These informal gatherings became the kindling for the English Reformation that would soon spread like wildfire across the British Isles.

### A Tutor at Little Sodbury

In 1521, Tyndale came to the conclusion he needed to step away from the academic atmosphere in order to give more

careful thought to the truths of the Reformation. Specifically, this young scholar wanted time to study and digest the Greek New Testament. He took a job in Gloucestershire, less than twelve miles from his birthplace, working for the wealthy family of Sir John Walsh at their estate, Little Sodbury. Tyndale served as the primary tutor for the children, private chaplain for the family, and personal secretary to Sir John. During this period, he preached regularly to a little congregation in nearby St. Adeline.

In considering the spiritual state of England, Tyndale came to the sober realization that England would never be evangelized using Latin Bibles. Therefore, Tyndale concluded, "It was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth, except the Scripture were laid before their eyes in their mother tongue." As he traveled throughout the region, fulfilling opportunities to preach, his beliefs were becoming well known as being distinctly Luther-like. His convictions became so strong that he found himself in disputes with officials in the Roman Catholic Church over the nature of the true gospel. Around 1522, he was called before John Bell, the Chancellor of Worcester, and warned about his controversial views. No formal charges were leveled against him at the time, but this conflict was only

a foretaste of what was to come.

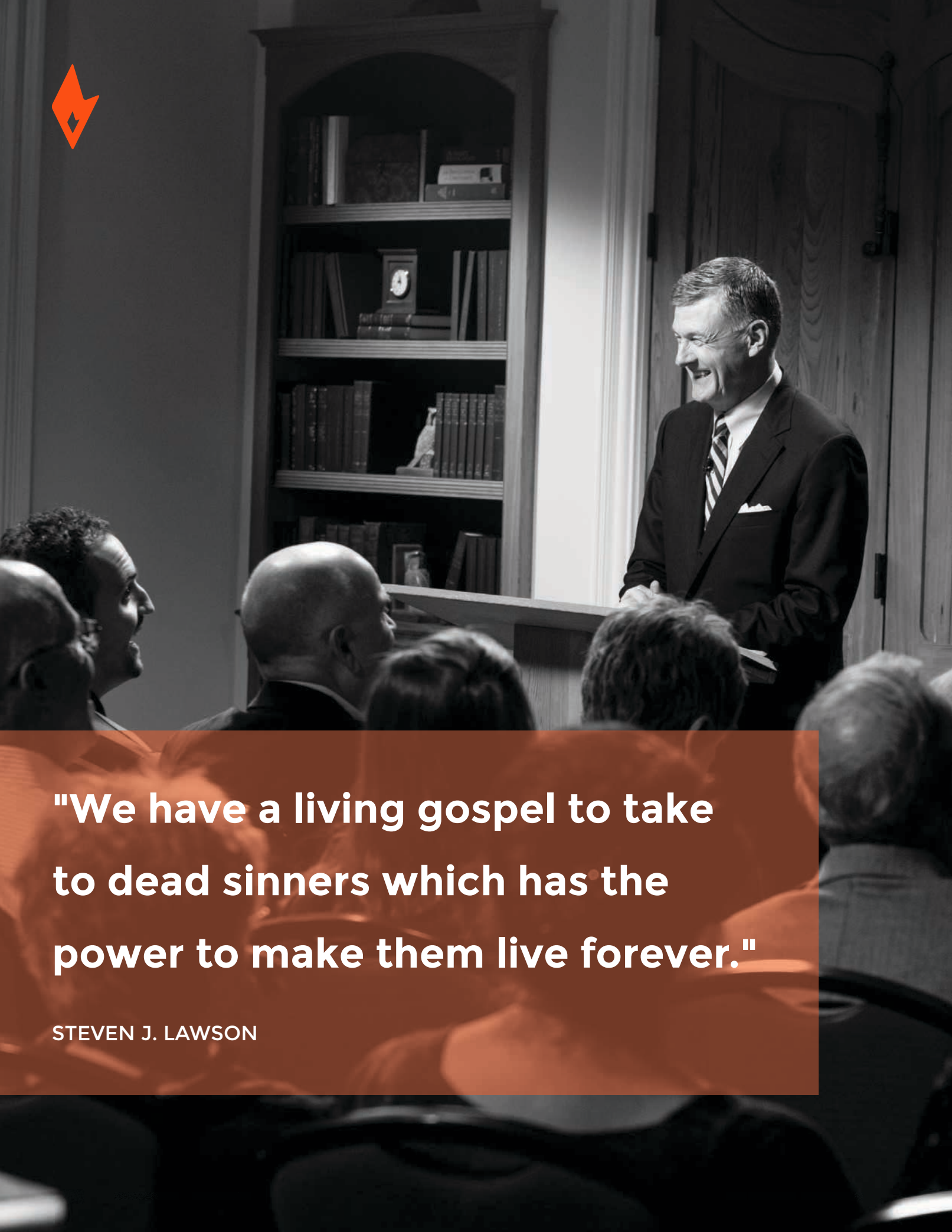
As local priests came to dine at the Walsh manor, Tyndale witnessed firsthand the appalling biblical ignorance of the Roman church. During one meal, he found himself in a heated debate with a Catholic clergyman. The priest asserted, "We had better be without God's law than the pope's." Tyndale boldly responded, "I defy the pope and all his laws." He then added these famous words, "If God spared him life, ere many years he would cause a boy that drives the plough to know more of the Scripture than he does." Tyndale was echoing Erasmus' words in the Preface to his recently published Greek New Testament, "I would to God that the plowman would sing a text of the Scripture at his plow and that the weaver would hum them to the tune of his shuttle." From this point forward, the ambitious task of translating the Bible into English was the dominating pursuit of his life. ♦

Excerpt from *The Daring Mission of William Tyndale* by Steven J. Lawson, to be published by Reformation Trust in 2015.



OnePassion makes available the preaching, teaching, and writing ministry of Dr. Steven J. Lawson through a comprehensive website. Visit our website for many resources, sermons, books, articles, interviews, transcripts, and to sign up for our newsletter.

**ONEPASSIONMINISTRIES.ORG**



**"We have a living gospel to take to dead sinners which has the power to make them live forever."**

**STEVEN J. LAWSON**





OnePassion Ministries exists to ignite a supreme passion for God and His glory in all people throughout the world. As our name indicates, the strategic goal of this ministry is to enflame hearts with an all-consuming desire for Jesus Christ and His gospel.

## OUR PURPOSE

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Our primary aim for believers from every walk of life is that they be revived and emboldened to live exclusively for the greatness of God. Most specifically, OnePassion is committed to training pastors in expository preaching that is firmly anchored in proclaiming God's Word.

## OUR PLATFORM

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OnePassion makes available the preaching, teaching, and writing ministry of Dr. Steven J. Lawson through a comprehensive website. OnePassion will host national and international conferences directed at training pastors and church leaders in expository preaching, while also bolstering the strong pursuit of godly living among laymen.

## OUR PRESIDENT

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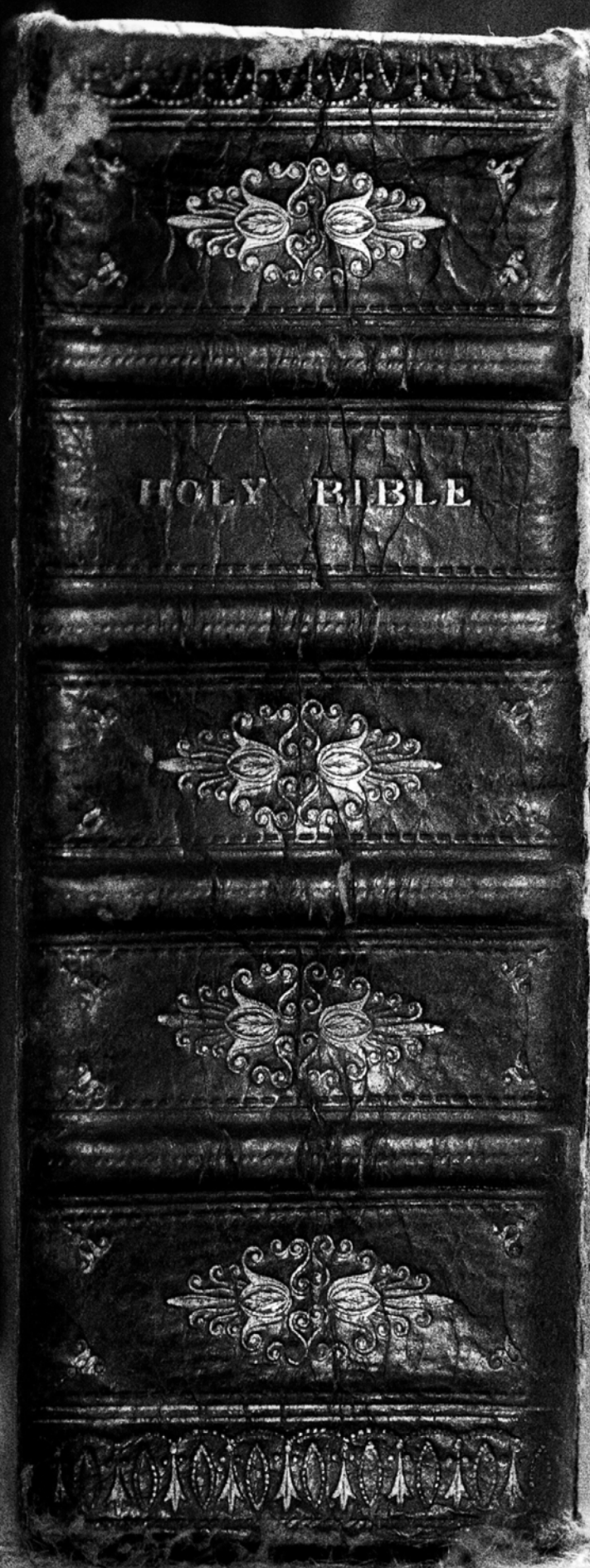
Dr. Steven J. Lawson is President and founder of OnePassion Ministries, a ministry designed to equip biblical expositors to bring about a new reformation in the church. Dr. Lawson hosts The Institute for Expository Preaching in cities around the world.

## OUR PROGRESS

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OnePassion and The Institute for Expository Preaching hosts conferences throughout the United States and around the world. In addition, Dr. Lawson leads church history tours and maintains a full preaching and ministry schedule. Visit our website for a schedule of Dr. Lawson's preaching venues and conferences.





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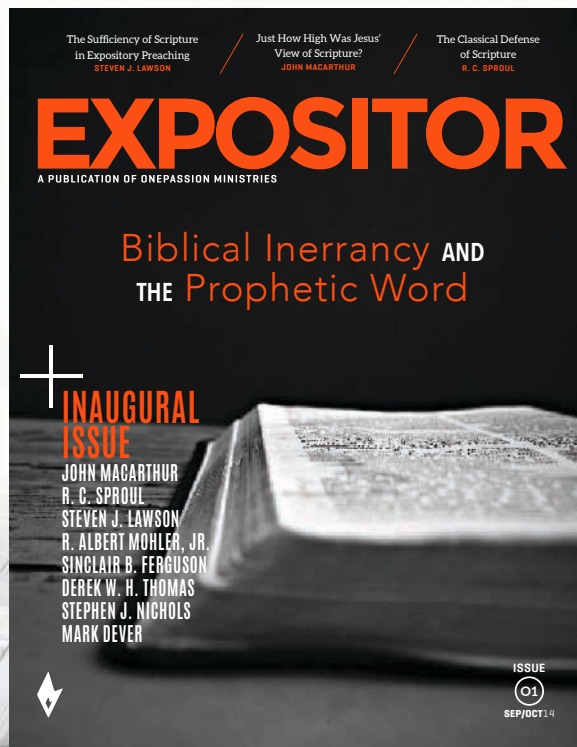
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