Elenctic Theology: Bibliology

Kevin Lewis

*The Inspiration & Inerrancy of the Bible*

## The Doctrine of Inspiration

Many theories have been proffered in an attempt to explain the inspiration of the Scriptures. The basic theories are presented below. Some of these theories overlap on certain points, and yet each theory has certain distinct ideas about the inspiration of the Bible.

### Defective Views of Inspiration

#### **Intuitive View**

##### *Definition*

###### Inspiration is the superior intuitive insight of natural man into moral and religious truth. Thus, the writers of Scripture were religious geniuses.

###### This theory emphasizes human speculation about God and the moral and religious realm apart from divine help.

##### *Objections*

###### It is a naturalistic, rationalistic, and humanistic approach.

###### It contradicts the teaching of Scripture

I Cor. 1:21

I Cor. 2:9–16

#### **Mystical View**

##### *Definition*

###### Inspiration is merely an intensifying and elevating of the religious perceptions of the believer.

###### Every believer has this illumination to an extent, but some have a greater degree than others.

##### *Objections*

###### It confuses inspiration with illumination.

###### It fails to recognize that inspiration is unique to biblical writers (2 Pet. 1:20–21), while all believers have illumination (John 16:12–15; 1 Cor. 2:9–16).

#### **Neo-Orthodox View**

##### *Definition*

###### Inspiration is a human production of a fallible record.

###### This record contains a witness to divine revelation.

###### Revelation is personal, not propositional.

##### *Objections*

###### If the Bible is a fallible record, then it is a false witness at certain points.

###### This theory contradicts the teachings of John 17:17 and 2 Tim. 3:16-17.

###### Biblical revelation is either propositional in form or reducible to propositional form (cf. John 17:17).

#### **Conceptual View**

##### *Definition*

###### Inspiration extends to the concepts or thoughts of Scripture but not to the very words.

##### *Objections*

###### Accurate communication of thoughts requires accurate communication of words, or words are the building blocks of thoughts.

###### See the emphasis on words in Matthew 4:4; 5:18; 24:35; John 6:63; 10:35.

###### Letters are the building blocks of words (Matt. 5:18).

#### **Fallible Inspiration View**

##### *Definition*

###### J. B. Phillips: “My conviction has grown that the New Testament is in a quite special sense inspired. It is not magical, nor is it faultless: human beings wrote it.”

###### Scripture is inspired but not infallible.

###### So who made the errors, God or man?

##### *Objections*

###### Who is to judge what parts of the Bible are in error and what parts are not?

###### What is the purpose of inspiration if not to insure infallibility?

###### This theory is contrary to the teaching of Matthew 5:18; John 10:35 that Scripture is infallible.

#### **Dynamic/Partial Inspiration View**

##### *Definition*

###### Inspiration extends only to matters of faith and practice or salvation and spiritual living.

###### Thus, the religious material is inspired, but the secular material is not.

###### For areas of knowledge other than religious faith and practice, biblical writers used their own human intelligence.

##### *Objections*

###### Matters of religious faith and practice are inseparably related to other areas of knowledge such as Ethics and Archaeology.

###### There is no evidence that God limited His superintendence solely to “religious” matters.

###### Scripture itself does not distinguish between these two areas of knowledge.

#### **Degrees of Inspiration View**

##### *Definition*

###### Clark Pinnock holds to inerrancy with “a more lenient definition” as over against strict inerrancy.

###### There are different kinds of biblical literature, “some that stand on high ground of revelation and others that occupy a lower position.”

###### Because of the diversity in claims of Scripture for itself, it is necessary “to distinguish between degrees of inspiration.”

##### *Objections*

###### Scripture distinguishes different modes of revelation and inspiration (Num. 12:6; Heb. 1:1–2; 1 Pet. 1:10–11) but not different degrees of revelation and inspiration.

###### Scripture teaches that “all Scripture is God–breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16).

###### This theory appears to confuse the conveying of truth with the uniformity of truth-content in biblical revelation. “But the truth that calls us to dialogue and decision is a different kind of truth from the truth of command and demand.”

#### **Dictation View**

##### *Definition*

###### Inspiration involves God’s use of biblical writers either as passive instruments or as stenographers.

###### The biblical writers were like Word Processors on which God wrote.

##### *Objections*

###### This theory does not properly account for the individual personality and the distinct literary style of each writer.

###### For example, compare the style of I Peter with Hebrews.

###### Note, however, parts of the Bible, such as the Ten Commandments, were dictated.

### The Scriptural View: Verbal, Plenary Inspiration

#### **The Definition of Verbal, Plenary Inspiration**

##### Verbal, plenary inspiration involves God's superintendence of the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man in the words of the original autographs.[[1]](#footnote-1)

##### In short, Verbal Plenary Inspiration means *every word* of the Scriptures is inspired (*theopneustos*).

#### **The Characteristics of Verbal, Plenary Inspiration**

##### **Verbal Inspiration**

###### Applies only to the original manuscripts (*autographa*).

###### However, some consider translations of Scriptures to be inspired and inerrant in a derivative or virtual sense insofar as they accurately represent the meaning of the originals.

###### Means that God’s superintendence extends to the very words of Scripture.

###### Verbal inspiration concerns the *intensiveness* of inspiration.

The Lord’s words are communicated to the prophet (Jer. 1:9).

The very letters that form the words of Scripture are significant (Matt. 5:18).

Christ’s argument in this context is based on the present tense of the verb “am” which is used instead of “was” (Matt. 22:31–32).

Christ’s argument in this context (John 10:34–36) is based on the single word “gods” (*Elohim*) from Psalm 82:6.

Paul’s argument in this context is based on the distinction between the singular and plural form of “seed” (Gal. 3:16).

##### **Plenary Inspiration**

###### Plenary inspiration means that every part of Scripture as defined by the Protestant Canon is equally inspired.

###### Plenary inspiration concerns the *extensiveness* of inspiration.

##### **Verbal, plenary inspiration allows for the evident phenomena in Scripture.**

###### God’s superintendence in the production of Scripture does not necessitate the dictation of Scripture.

###### There are obvious differences in personality and literary styles of the biblical authors.

###### The evident use in Scripture of:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Diverse Expression | *E.g.,* the inscriptions on the cross recorded in  Matt. 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19 |
| Literary Documents | *E.g.,* Luke 1:1–4; cf. Josh. 10:13; Acts 17:28; Jude 14 |
| Phenomenal Language | *E.g*., the sun rising and setting as in Genesis 15:12; Matthew 5:45 |
| Figurative Language | *E.g*., “door” in John 10:9 as a symbol of Christ, the entry into salvation |

#### **The Process of Verbal, Plenary Inspiration**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| God | Divine Source | “by” & “from” | 2 Tim. 3:16—Truth Revealed |
| Writer | Human Agent | “through” | 2 Pet. 1:21—Truth Relayed |
| Bible | Divine-Human Product | “in” | John 17:17—Truth Recorded |

##### We see this pattern in Matthew 1:22–23: by the Lord, through the author, and in Scripture.

##### **The Analogy of the Virgin Birth & Hypostatic Union**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Virgin Birth & Hypostatic Union of Christ’s Two Natures | Biological Miracle: Divine and Human Natures United | Divine-Human Person (Infallible and Sinless) |
| Inspiration of the Bible | Psychological Miracle | Divine-Human Book (Infallible and Perfect) |

##### In both cases the Holy Spirit is the divine, personal Agent (Matt. 1:18; 2 Pet. 1:20–21).

#### **The Proof of Verbal, Plenary Inspiration (See also, Proof of Inspiration Syllabus)**

##### **Church History**

###### Verbal, plenary inspiration was almost the unanimous viewpoint of the early church fathers, the medieval theologians, the reformers, and contemporary evangelical Christians.

###### We should note that “although the testimony of the Fathers is not authoritative or inspired, it does reveal the orthodox doctrine of inspiration that prevailed throughout the history of the church. Their testimony, with hardly a dissenting voice, reflects the traditional view of the origin and nature of Scripture from apostolic times to the rise of Deism and Rationalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

##### **The Character of God**

###### Scripture is a reliable record.

###### Scripture reveals a God of truth (John 17:3; Romans 3:4; 1 John 5:20) who therefore cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18).

###### All Scripture is inspired of God (“God-breathed”) (2 Tim. 3:16).

###### Therefore, Scripture must be truth (John 17:17).

###### To say that the Bible is God’s Word (John 17:17, “Your word is truth”; cf. 1 Thess. 2:13), and yet at the same time to say that it errs, contradicts the truthfulness of God’s character (cf. Num. 23:19).

##### **The Claims of Scripture Itself**

###### The fullness and fact of inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16).

###### The men and the method of inspiration (2 Pet. 1:21).

###### “The Spirit, thus, became a Coauthor with each human writer of the Bible.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

This principle can be seen in Matthew 22:43 (cf. Ps. 110:1); Acts 1:16; 4:25–26.

The human element is especially evident in Romans 9:1–3.

###### The command to record the words of the Lord (Exod. 17:14; Jer. 30:2).

###### The viewpoint of biblical writers in quoting other Scriptures (Matt. 1:22; 15:4; 22:43; Acts 4:24–25; 28:25; Heb. 3:7).

###### The viewpoint of biblical writers towards other parts of Scripture (cf. 1 Tim. 5:18 with Deut. 25:4; Luke 10:7; and cf. 2 Pet. 3:15–16 with Gal. 2:11).

###### The viewpoint of biblical writers that they were speaking and writing God's Word (1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:10–11).

###### The characteristics of Scripture presented as:

Perfect (Ps. 19:7).

Pure (19:8).

Right (19:8, 9).

True (19:9).

Unchangeable (119:89).

Eternal (Matt. 24:35).

##### **The Confirmation by Christ**

###### Concerning the Old Testament Scriptures (Matt. 5:18; John 10:35; 17:17).

###### Concerning His own words

He claimed authority for them (Matt. 7:24).

People recognized their authority (7:29).

If the Bible is considered historically reliable, then Jesus is the risen Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). As risen Lord, He is infallible and authoritative. Then the Bible is also infallible and authoritative because the Lord Jesus pronounced it so.

Said another way: “Indications from the gospel records, with ample historical backing, show that Jesus was a man of integrity and truth…. In order to deny the authority of Scripture one must reject the integrity of Christ.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

##### **The Consideration of NT Inspiration**

###### Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would give revelation through the apostles (Matt. 10:19–20; John 14:25–26; 16:13).

###### The apostles demonstrated their authority which confirmed their claim to give divinely authoritative teaching (Acts 3:6–7; Heb. 2:3–4; cf. Acts 10:41–42; Gal. 1:1, 11–12; 1 Thess. 2:13).

###### The apostles functioned as the revelatory foundation of the church (Eph. 2:19–20[[5]](#footnote-5); cf. Acts 2:42; 2 Pet. 3:2).

###### The prophetic gift possessed by the NT apostles (Eph. 2:20; Rev. 22:9, 18).

#### **Brief Summary of the Biblical Evidence for V.P.I.**

##### II Tim. 3:16 – *Theopneustos*

##### Jer. 1:9 - Words in Prophet’s mouth

##### Matt 5:18 - Jot and Tittle (y and d v. r)

##### Matt. 22:31, 32 - Verb Tense (Present v. Past)

##### John 10:34, 36 - Unbroken Scripture

##### Gal. 3:16 - Seed v. Seeds (Singular v. Plural)

#### **The Objections to Verbal, Plenary Inspiration (& Inerrancy)**

##### ***Overview***

###### The truthfulness of Scripture requires that all its teachings harmonize with one another and with extra-biblical truth and that any alleged contradictions or errors in Scripture must be only apparent and not real.

###### Underlying this conclusion is the principle that truth is self-consistent.

##### ***Justification for Inerrancy & Principles for Resolving Bible Difficulties*** See Bible Difficulties Syllabus & Lectures

#### **The Logical Conclusions of Verbal, Plenary Inspiration (VPI)**

##### ***The Scriptures are Inerrant.***

###### *The Definition of Inerrancy*

“By this word [inerrancy] we mean that the Scriptures possess the quality of freedom from error. They are exempt from the liability to mistake, incapable of error. In all their teachings they are in perfect accord with truth.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

When all the facts are known, Scripture, in the Autographs, properly interpreted, will be shown to be wholly true in everything it claims, in every field of knowledge.

###### *The Essential Argument for Inerrancy*

Since God always tells the truth (Num 23:19; Titus 1:2),

Since every word has been inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16-17),

Conclusion: There are no errors in God’s Written Revelation.

###### *Inerrancy & Infallibility Distinguished*

Inerrancy

It is the quality of being free from all falsehood or mistake.

Hence, the Bible is trustworthy in all it asserts.

Infallibility

It is the quality of neither misleading nor being mislead.

Hence, the Bible is a sure, safe guide in all matters (John 10:34).

###### *Select Biblical References to Inerrancy*

Proverbs 30:5

John 17:17

Mt. 22:29

Titus 1:2

###### *Inerrancy: Christ, the God-man, Affirms Historical People & Events*

Lk 11:51 – Cain & Abel

Mt. 19:4-5 – Adam & Eve

Mt. 24:37-39 – Noah & the Flood

Lk. 10:12 – Destruction of Sodom

Mt. 12:39-41 – Jonah in the belly of the sea creature

Mk.7:10, Jn. 7:19 – Moses as a historical person

Jn. 12:38-41 – Isaiah the Prophet as a historical person

###### *The Proof of Inerrancy* (See also Syllabus on Proof of Inspiration)

The trustworthiness of God’s character (John 17:3; Rom. 3:4).

The teaching of Christ (Matt. 5:18; John 10:35; 17:17).

The biblical arguments based on a word or the form of a word.

###### *The Extent of Inerrancy*

Inerrancy includes secular matters such as history, science, psychology, etc., as well as religious matters of faith and practice or salvation and spiritual living.

Both religious matters and so-called secular matters are inextricably related in Scripture.

1. Ryrie, 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*. Revised and expanded edition (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ryrie, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Geisler and Nix, 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Christ gave revelation pertinent to the future church (e.g., Matt. 16:16–18; 18:15–17; John 14:20), but He functioned primarily as the redemptive foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20; cf. 1 Cor. 3:11; 1 Pet. 2:6). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Edward J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)