

Apostolic Hermeneutics

Using book God's Infallible Word – Bro. David K Bernard

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Authority of Apostles from Old Testament

- New Testament writers acknowledged that other New Testament writings were inspired Scripture. To teach financial support for the ministry, Paul quoted from Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7, introducing both verses with the phrase, “For the Scripture says” (I Timothy 5:18). He thereby acknowledged the Gospel of Luke to be authoritative Scripture just like the law of Moses. Peter likewise classified Paul’s epistles as Scripture (II Peter 3:15-16).

The Extent of Inspiration

Inspiration relates to the writing process and its results. It refers primarily to the scriptural writings rather than to the authors. It is specifically “Scripture” (Greek *graphe*, literally, the “writing”) that is inspired (II Timothy 3:16).

The Bible **does not teach that inspiration was a gift resident within certain people**, thereby making them infallible.

Rather, inspiration was a process that produced specific documents.

All the words, writings, or actions of a biblical writer are not authoritative; only the writings that God inspired are the infallible Word of God.

The Extent of Inspiration

For example, God inspired David to write many psalms, but his sins of adultery and murder were contrary to the Word of God. God inspired Peter to write two letters, but he was wrong when he temporarily withdrew from fellowship with Gentile Christians (Galatians 2:11-14).

The statements of Scripture are inspired even beyond the full understanding or purposes of the writers.

The prophets knew the meaning of the words they prophesied, but often they did not understand all the implications or manner of fulfillment (**I Peter 1:10-12**). (See Daniel **12:8-9**.)

The Extent of Inspiration

Strictly speaking, inspiration refers to the original writing process and text; that is, the Bible does not say all subsequent efforts to copy and translate Scripture would be inspired. This observation does not mean that the Bible we have today is not the Word of God; it only means that we do not attribute any defects of textual transmission and translation to His inspiration.

Although we do not have the original manuscripts, we can affirm that a **good copy or translation is accurate**. For all practical purposes it is the inspired Word of God to us.

The Extent of Inspiration

In contrast to the Old Testament, manuscripts of the New Testament are abundant and many are remarkably close in time to the autographs. In general, copies of the New Testament were made more prolifically but less accurately. Systematic, official copying began at the direction of Emperor Constantine to Eusebius in the fourth century.

It is evident that God has providentially preserved the text. Technically speaking, inspiration refers to the autographs of Scripture, but copies of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original. We can affirm the virtual inspiration of the historically transmitted text: for all practical purposes it is the inspired Word of God to us.

The accuracy of NT Interpretation

Relative Reliability of the New Testament Text

Author and book	Number of manuscripts	Approximate years later than autographs
Herodotus, <i>History</i>	8	1,350
Thucydides, <i>History</i>	8	1,300
Plato, <i>Tetralogies</i>	7	1,300
Demosthenes	200	1,400
Caesar, <i>Gallic War</i>	10	900
Livy, <i>History of Rome</i> (only 35 of 142 books)	20	1 partial: 350 19 others: 1,000
Tacitus, <i>Histories</i> (only 4 of 14 books)	2	750
Tacitus, <i>Annals</i> (only 10 of 16 books)	2	750
Pliny Secundus, <i>Natural History</i>	7	750
New Testament	5,366	fragment: 30-50 most of NT: 150 all of NT: 250

Variants and Scribal Errors

- There are relatively few variants among Old Testament manuscripts, for the Masoretes and their predecessors resolved most discrepancies and transmitted the results to us. But there are a large number of New Testament manuscripts and a large number of variants among them— about 200,000 in about 10,000 places in Scripture.
- Most of them are insignificant—obvious scribal errors, spelling and stylistic variations, and other variations that make no appreciable difference in meaning. Various scholars have estimated the purity of our New Testament text as 98.33, 99.75, or 99.9 percent

Variants and Scribal Errors

- The percentage for two comparable ancient religious books is significantly less—95 for Homer's Iliad and 90 for the Hindu Mahabharata.
- Out of the thousands of variant readings in the manuscripts, none has turned up thus far that requires a revision of Christian doctrine.
- only one letter out of 1,580 in the Old Testament and . . . no more than one one-thousandth part of the New Testament. . . . Only 400 [New Testament variants] materially alter the sense. Among these, no more than about 50 have real importance for any reason whatever; and even in the case of these 50, not one touches on any article of faith or any moral commandment not forcibly supported by other entirely clear passages, or by the teaching of the Bible as a whole

Unintentional Changes

- a. **Errors of the eye**. Misreading similar letters or words; accidentally omitting a letter, word, or line, sometimes because two lines began or ended with the same word; copying a letter, word, or phrase twice.
- b. **Errors of the ear**, when reading aloud or taking dictation. Confusing two words that sound similar; confusing two words that sound the same but are spelled differently.
- c. **Errors of memory**. Substituting synonyms; varying word order; transposing letters; modifying a passage after a parallel passage better known to the scribe.
- d. **Errors of judgment**. Inserting into the text explanatory notes from the margin or from between the lines; incorrect division of words.
- e. **Errors of writing**, often due to rapid copying. Writing indistinctly; writing incorrectly.

Intentional Changes

- a. **Changes of spelling and grammar.** Conforming to spelling or grammar the scribe considered better or more correct; conforming to changes in the language.
- b. **Liturgical changes,** often originally in lectionaries. Modifying an excerpt so it could be read publicly without explanation; making alterations to conform to church usage.
- c. **Harmonizing changes.** Modifying quotations or parallel accounts to agree more closely with each other.
- d. **Addition of complements and adjuncts.** Amplifying; rounding off phrases; adding an implied word, a common title to a name, or a word commonly paired with another.
- e. **Clearing up difficulties.** “Correcting” supposed errors; resolving geographical and historical difficulties.
- f. **Conflation.** Combining variants in two manuscripts being copied instead of choosing one over the other.
- g. **Addition of miscellaneous details.** Supplying names for unnamed characters; adding traditional or legendary details; expanding book titles.
- h. **Doctrinal changes.** Eliminating or altering something regarded as inconvenient or unacceptable; adding support for a favorite doctrine or practice. These changes are the most serious, but they are relatively few.

Example of Major Textual Variants

- **Acts** 1:8 witnesses to Me (MT); My witnesses (CT)
- 1:14 prayer and supplication (MT); prayer (CT)
- 1:15 disciples (MT); brethren (CT)
- 2:1 with one accord (MT); together (CT)
- 2:23 you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified (MT); you by lawless hands have crucified (CT)
- 2:30 of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne (MT); of the fruit of his body, He would seat one on his throne (CT)
- 2:41 gladly received (MT); received (CT)
- 2:47 added to the church (MT); added (CT)
- 3:20 Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before (RT); Christ Jesus, who was ordained for you before (MT, CT)
- 3:24 foretold (RT); proclaimed (MT, CT)
- 4:25 who by the mouth of Your servant David have said (MT); who through the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father, your servant David, have said (CT)

Conclusion

- From our study of textual criticism, it is apparent that God has indeed preserved His Word to all generations. **In His providence He has ensured that any scribal errors or changes would not become widely accepted or, if accepted, would still harmonize with the message of His eternal Word.**
- As a result, **the Bible we have today is effective in our lives as the Word of God.**

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