

SOUL FOOD - The Things You Need To Know About Your Bible - Pt 5

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## ARE THE WORDS OF SCRIPTURE INSPIRED, OR JUST THE THOUGHTS?

**John 17:8** - "For I [Jesus] have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me."

There is a ***process*** and ***progress of revelation*** that unfolds in the Scriptures. That's the process that's been at the center of our study these past few Sundays of this series. First, we established the canon of the Old Testament. The Scriptures Jesus studied and endorsed were the Hebrew Scriptures. There were 24 books, beginning in Genesis and finishing in Chronicles (first and second in one book). These 24 books contain exactly the same books as the 39 that we have ordered more ***chronologically*** from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the ***Septuagint***. And from Jesus' comments in **Luke 11:49-51** we saw that He limited the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures to ***only*** those 24 books.

Then something very dramatic happened. Jesus Christ, God the Son, came on the scene. He said that all of those sacred Hebrew Scriptures were about Him. He said this over and over. He said Abraham had longed to see His (Jesus') day. And then Jesus did something else. He placed His own authority right along side - and sometimes even ***above*** those Hebrew prophets. He said He, and He alone, ***fulfilled*** or ***completed*** or ***fleshed out*** what those Hebrew Scriptures were all about.

And those first followers - those devout ***Jewish*** followers - found what Jesus said and what He did compelling. Then the story went further. Jesus told them He was going to use ***them*** to place His story of redemption into the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures. He said the Holy Spirit would especially ***oversee*** and ***inspire*** new sacred texts. And we see how the writings of the apostles were specifically called ***Scripture*** in the New Testament, right along side the 24 canonized books of the Hebrew Scriptures.

And then, finally, we see the process brought to ***completion***. In highly significant words, **Jude 3** says, "Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith **that was once for all delivered to the saints.**"

So we now have a completed revelation. The Old Testament looked forward to Christ. And Christ, by His Spirit, enabled His Apostles to record the fulfillment of redemption. The church has a permanently

authoritative record. There is nothing left to add or supplement. We're not completing the canon of Scripture, but are **contending** for what was "**once for all delivered.**"

Today we want to study the nature of the **inspiration** given to the writers of the Scriptures. What are we to expect when the Holy Spirit inspires Sacred text? How safe are we in relying on our Bibles for a revelation from God? In what sense is the Bible **God's Word**?

Everyone who is a member of Cedarview Community Church has signed his or her name on a statement of faith that says we are committed to the truth that the Bible is "**...the inspired and infallible Word of God.**" And this boils down to a fundamental question. What is the **nature** of the **inspiration** of Scripture? Is it just inspired in its **effect** on our hearts? Or is it inspired in the nature of the **text itself**? Is the Bible inspired, even if no one reads it, or is it inspired only when it comes to life in our hearts? And if the text is inspired **in itself**, are the actual **words** of the original manuscripts divinely inspired, or is it just the **general concepts and ideas** of God's revelation that are divinely given?

1) **THE UNEQUIVOCAL CONVICTION OF JESUS WAS HE GAVE HIS DISCIPLES GOD'S WORDS**

**John 17:8 - "For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me."**

As I'm hoping to show, on this truth stands the whole fabric of revelation and doctrine. All our teaching, all our churches, all our doctrines and practices, stand on the fact that Jesus has given His apostles the **words** of truth. He didn't just give **a word**, or some **thoughts**, or a **philosophy**. He gave the Father's **words - nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, sentences - words - words that came from Father God Himself.**

The foundation of the Christian faith doesn't rest on our best guesswork about the mind of God. Jesus didn't just come as a prophet declaring what **He** thought we should know about the Creator and eternity. He tells His apostles plainly that the **words** He gave to them - and this surely includes **all** the words of teaching and instruction of His earthly ministry - those **words** were, in a sense, not just **His** words at all. He gave them the **words** chosen by God Himself.

We start with this ground of certainty. We don't lay the foundation of our faith on **speculation**. We don't start with the **subjective**. We begin with **words** - words chosen and given by Father God Himself. So the **message** is secure and divine and the **medium** is secure and divine.

But if this foundation is **secure** it also seems very **temporary**. Jesus didn't stay here on earth in His physical body. And if **Jesus** gave us the very **words** of Father God, what became of the message after His ascension - His departure from the earthly presence of mankind? There were no New Testament documents written when Jesus was ascended. So surely we are left today at a disadvantage. Perhaps indeed the Apostles were given the very words of God through His Son, Jesus Christ. But **we** have had no such privilege. Jesus, the One **bearing** such blessed witness to the words of the Father was long ascended by the time even the earliest New Testament documents were penned.

2) **WHILE JESUS WAS GIVING THE APOSTLES THE VERY WORDS OF THE FATHER, HE MADE IT PLAIN THAT HIS REVEALING MINISTRY WOULD CONTINUE AFTER HE WAS ASCENDED THROUGH THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN HIS CHOSEN APOSTLES**

In other words, the very words of Father God make it clear that what Jesus was revealing while here on earth was only the **beginning** of the unfolding of Christian doctrine and truth. And it's right at this very point that we can observe something truly amazing.

In spite of the fact that Jesus had given those Apostles the very **words** of Father God - words revealing the truth the Father had for them - they didn't **grasp** the meaning of those words very well. This fact is open to anyone with an honest eye to the Scriptures. In fact, many examples abound in the context of our opening text from the Apostle John:

***"We do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"(John 14:5). "Show us the Father, and it is enough for us"(14:8). "How is it that you will manifest yourself to us and not to the world?"(14:22). "What is this that he says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'; and, 'because I am going to the Father'?"(16:17). "We do not know what He is talking about!"(16:18).***

What a muddled list of questions and confusion. The revelation they are receiving is absolutely

**perfect.** Over and over again, Jesus is giving them the very **words** from the Father and they still don't get what those words **mean**. Is this a mistake? Is something wrong with their heads? Has the revelation from the Father failed? Would we have done better if we were in their shoes?

No. Jesus makes the meaning of all this very clear with His own telling explanation. The process of revelation hasn't failed. But it's just **beginning**. Many events are still to happen. Another phase is essential before they will fully understand:

**John 16:4b-5a, 12-14 - "...I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. [5] But now I am going to him who sent me....16:12-14....I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. [13] When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. [14] He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."**

All of these words from Jesus - **words** given Him from the Father - point to a time of **transition** in revelation. There were things that couldn't be understood at that time because none of them had happened yet. Jesus hadn't died. There was no cross. No resurrection. No ascension. No outpouring of the Holy Spirit. No idea of Jesus going away, or where He was going. Certainly no clue about His second coming.

All of these events would require a different **type** of revelation. The very nature of Jesus' work required His **departure**. He couldn't ascend to heaven to intercede at the Father's right hand if He remained in bodily form with them on earth. No wonder Jesus said, **"...It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you"**(John 16:7).

This is truly wonderful to think about. Jesus forges the whole chain of revelation around Himself. First He comes and looks back to the **past** and says the whole Old Testament is about Him. He was the object of all its laws, sacrifices and prophecies and promises. Then He pushes revelation into the **future** and says He will still be at the center of it. It will still come **from** Him and it will still be **about** Him. That Christ may **be** all and **in** all. In everything He has pre-eminence.

3) **THE WHOLE NEW TESTAMENT BEARS UNIFORM WITNESS TO THE PROGRESS OF REVELATION FROM THE REVEALING WORK OF JESUS IN HIS WORDS *BEFORE HIS ASCENSION* TO THE CONTINUING REVEALING WORK OF JESUS *AFTER ASCENSION* THROUGH THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE WORDS OF THE APOSTLES**

In other words, the **authority** of revelation continues after Jesus' ascension. But the **method** is changed. This is how revelation unfolds until the completion of the New Testament canon. And when you **realize** this truth, you will see it over and over again in the New Testament itself:

**Acts 1:1-2 - "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus ***began*** to do and teach, [2] until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen."**

So Luke says his gospel - in many ways the most vigorously researched and detailed - was just a record of what Jesus ***began*** to teach. The teaching ministry of Jesus wasn't ***finished*** at the time of His death and resurrection. Now, in the book of Acts, written ***after*** Jesus ascended, we would see Jesus ***continuing*** to teach.

The **authority** was the same. But the **method** was different. Jesus would be at work in the words and deeds of His chosen Apostles, just as He had predicted and promised - **John 16:12-14 - "*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. [13] When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. [14] He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.*"**

Notice, "***I*** still have many things to say to you"(12). It would still be ***Jesus*** speaking, but by the Spirit, through the Apostles. Same **authority**. Different **method**. You can see the **continuity** implied in Luke's carefully chosen words. His gospel contained what Jesus ***began*** to teach before His ascension. The book of Acts recorded what Jesus ***continued*** to teach after His ascension.

**Hebrews 2:3 - "...how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? ***It was declared at first by the Lord***, and it was attested to us by those who heard...."** Notice again the foundation. The message declared ***"at first"*** by the Lord. He came and pronounced the

arrival of the fulfillment of the whole Old Testament. He came with the **“words of the Father.”** But He wasn’t the **last** to bear that message.

Again, the chain of revelation in the New Testament is established - and **needed** to be established - in such a way that there would be a revelation from Christ, by His Spirit, through His apostles, to His **finished** work. Christ, through His Apostles, reveals His glory and power and ongoing ministry long after His ascension. And the church **needs** this revelation. We need a revelation from Jesus that will guide the church in the **proclamation of Christ**. This never was possible while He was still here on earth. His **finished** work wasn’t finished yet.

Here may be the clearest testimony to Christ’s ongoing revealing authority to His church - **Galatians 1:1-5** - **“Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— [2] and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: [3] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, [4] who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, [5] to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”**

**That** revelation from Christ would never have been possible before Christ’s ascension. Our foundation is not **less** certain than when Jesus walked this earth giving His followers the very **words** of the Father - **2 Peter 1:17-21** - **“For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” [18] we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. [19] And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, [20] knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. [21] For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”**

We have something better than a voice from heaven. Christ gave His Apostles the very words of Father God. And Christ has ensured the church the same blessed heritage through the blessed record of our New Testament.