

(II Timothy 3:16-17)

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

Years ago, a Frenchman named Peter Roget gave to the world one of the great literary documents of lingual history. Mr. Roget’s father was a French Baptist pastor, and he took the name of his book from the French New Testament. The book is like a dictionary — it has a great vocabulary, but a poor plot! We know it as Roget’s Thesaurus. The word “thesaurus” is the word used in the Greek New Testament for a “treasury” or a “treasure.” So his book was called “Roget’s Treasury of Words.” I think he probably knew as a French Baptist pastor’s son that the *true* treasury of words is in the Book we call the Bible.

An intellectual skeptic said to an enthusiastic Christian, “How do you reconcile the teachings of the Bible with the latest finds of modern science?” The wise Christian answered, “Sir, *just what are the latest findings of modern science?*” You see, the “latest findings of modern science” change continuously. A scientific textbook is obsolete five years after it is published. But the Bible is like a giant rock standing in the mainstream of fast-flowing history, with eddied swirling this way and that way and striking full up against it — and they only polish the rock and prove it. They don’t change it or shake it. Isaiah 40:8 says, “The grass withereth, and the flower fadeth, but the Word of our God shall stand forever.” Psalm 119:89 says, “Forever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in Heaven.” Jesus said, “No jot (the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet) or tittle (the smallest twist or turn of the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet) will ever pass away until all these words are fulfilled. Heaven and earth may pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

So let’s consider God’s Treasure of Words. I want to do a “three-eyed” study.

I. The INSPIRATION of the Word

First, we will consider the vital matter of the *inspiration* of Scripture. II Timothy 3:16 claims that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” Nothing could be of greater importance than this claim. If it is not true, Christianity collapses at the point of authority. If it is true, Christianity stands in its total truth and in its significance in determining each man’s eternal destiny.

When the skeptic hears this claim, he may object, “Just a minute! Some of your so-called ‘Scripture’ was not even in existence when this statement was written, and some of it wasn’t even compiled into a Bible. So how can you apply *this* statement to all those things that came later?”

Suppose I said to you, “All rain is wet.” Am I describing only *past* rain, or the little past rain that I have known, or all past rain that *anybody* has ever known, or all past rain *whether anybody has ever known it or not*, or *am I actually talking about all rain* — whether past, present, or future rain? You can make this rule — wherever it rains, it’s going to be wet. Whether it was past rain, and whether you were present, or anybody was present except God, it was still wet. And when rain falls today, whether you or anybody else are present or not present, it is still wet. And when rain falls in the future, it is still going

to be wet. So when the writer says, “All Scripture,” he means that which God has revealed and recorded of Himself and His truth, whether it has been recorded at the time or not, whether it has been recognized at the time or not.

“All Scripture is inspired of God.” I must begin our study by challenged one of the most sacred terms in the vocabulary of all Bible believers. The word “inspiration” itself leaves something to be desired in understanding the Divine origin of the Scriptures. To “inspire” means to “breathe into,” and the Bible did not become the Word of God by God breathing into it. Technically, the better word would be “spiration,” or simply “spired,” which means “breathed.” But the very best word is the word “expired” or “expiration,” which means “out-breathed.” You may think I am splitting hairs, but it is the failure to “split hairs” in our doctrine of inspiration which allows us to hold loose and inferior views of the inspiration of Scripture. The Scriptures were *breathed out by God Himself*, so that the Bible is the product of the breath of God. I will seek to make the difference in these terms apparent as we move along.

The Bible itself makes this claim in our text, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” The five words in the King James Version, “given by inspiration of God,” all translate one Greek word. The Greek word is the word, *theopneustos*. The word literally means “God-breathed.” To say that the Scriptures are “inspired,” or “breathed *into*”, by God is to allow the possibility of a less-than-Biblical view of the Bible as the Word of God. This term permits the extremely weak “Neo-Orthodox” view that the Bible *contains* the Word of God, and that it *becomes* the Word of God *only* when God speaks to you from its page. So the standard of the Bible’s value as the Word of God is existential, experiential, and empirical. I repeat, this is a less-than-Scriptural view of the Bible. But it’s technically permitted by the word, “inspiration,” which does not translate the word “theopneustos” with careful accuracy. There is a very real sense in which God *does* “breathe into” His Word, but this is a matter of *illumination* rather than *inspiration*.

In the two verses which bracket II Timothy 3:16, Paul gives two of the greatest objectives for which God gave us His Word. The first is to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (vs. 15). These words should be weighed carefully. And the second objective is to equip the already-saved person that he may be “complete and thoroughly prepared for every (truly) good work” (vs. 17). But our purpose at this time concerns the *origin* of Scripture rather than its *objective*.

It is the claim of the Bible itself that the breath of God produced each Scripture, just as my breath produces my words, making them the vehicle of my thought.

Personally, I hold to a *dynamic plenary verbal* view of the origin of Scripture. “Dynamic” means to me that the Scriptures originated by the vital and immediate work of God the Holy Spirit. “Plenary” means that the whole Bible was so produced. And “verbal” means that God the Holy Spirit so supervised the creation of the Bible as to select the very words.

Perhaps the most definitive and exhaustive statement in the Bible of the origin of Scripture is found in II Peter 1:20-21. A word-by-word analysis of these verses would prove “profitable for doctrine” at this point. “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” “Knowing this first” means that this is of first, or primary, importance. The phrase, “no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation,” has been variously understood. The question (and it is of extreme importance) is, Does this sentence refer to the

original production of the Bible, or does it refer to our *present perception, understanding, and interpretation* of the Bible? The key is the verb. The King James Version says, “is.” “No prophecy *is* of any private interpretation.” But the word “is” is an inadequate translation. The Greek word is *ginetai*, which means “come to be” or “has its source” or “comes to pass.” The New International Version is accurate in translating, “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man.” The volition of man did not originate the Bible; it came from the initiative and creative activity of the Lord Almighty! The word translated “interpretation” is another commanding word of this passage. It is the original word *epiluseos*. It means “to untie, to unloose, to release, to unfold, to unravel, to disclose.” The noun occurs in the New Testament only here. The verb form of the same word is used twice in the New Testament, once in Mark’s Gospel, where it means to unravel the mystery of a parable, and once in the Acts of the Apostles, where it means to solve a problem. So the sentence could read, “No prophecy of Scripture has its source in any private disclosure.” The next sentence of the text (vs. 21) echoes the negative of vs. 20 and then adds the positive side: “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man.” The verb “came” is a form of the verb translated “moved” later in the same verse. So it literally reads, “The prophecy was not brought into being at any time by the will of man.”

The last sentence of verse 21 may well be the most important sentence in Scripture in declaring the truth about the origin of the Bible as God’s Word: “But holy men of God spake as moved by the Holy Ghost.” Again, we will labor the words and seek the most absolute accuracy in meaning. Note that God used “men” in transmitting the truth of Scripture. This, coupled with an awareness of the unique personality which showed in the writings of each human author, greatly weakens in my view any concept of mechanical dictation in producing the Bible. Some teach that God used the writers as totally passive secretaries, but this is hardly substantiated by a careful appraisal of Scripture. In the Bible, John comes across as the mystic that he is; Paul writes as a systematic theologian with a fantastic devotional capacity; and Luke shows the concurrence of the skilled historian and the medical doctor. Their personalities are not over-ruled, though they are overwhelmed by the process of inspiration. The writers were “men”, not mechanical tools. They may have been instruments, but they were not automatons.

Then, our sentence needs a slight adjustment in translation for the sake of accuracy. The text does not literally say, “Holy men of God spoke.” It rather says, “Men spoke from God.” Note that massive word, “from.” It means *right out of God*, right out of the very depths of Deity! Men spoke out of God! Their speech was born in God; it was God-caused, God-driven, God-controlled. Friends, we must be very, very careful about our treatment of the Bible.

Perhaps the most monumental word in II Peter 1:21 is the word, “moved.” It comes from the word *fero*, which means “to bear along,” or “to carry along.” “Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Ghost.” This word is highly picturesque. It is the same word used twice in Acts 27 (verses 15-17), which records the story of the great storm at sea which struck the ship which was transporting the Apostle Paul to his trial before the Caesar in Rome. The ship was struck by “a tempestuous wind,” and we read: “And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her *drive*. And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat: Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, struck sail, and so *were driven*.” The words “drive” and “were driven” translate the same Greek root. “We let her continue to *be carried along*.” “And they continued to *be carried along*.” This is the same word used in our text.

This word is also used in the description of Pentecost in Acts 2:2. “Suddenly there was a sound from heaven as *being borne along* by a violent wind.” So “men spoke from God, being carried along,”

driven by the Holy Spirit as Paul's ship was driven by the wind. Moses, Elijah, Micah, Amos, Matthew, Mark, Paul, Peter, and the others, were all wind-swept children of God, driven by mysterious currents which they could never explain.

A solid illustration at this point might break the heavy spell of technical interpretation. I have been privileged to visit Athens, Greece, on two occasions. The second time, our tour group was assigned a brilliant female guide who gave marvelous explanations of the history and geography of that famed spot, but she was devoid of understanding of any spiritual significance. In her lecture from the Acropolis, she pointed away to the Acro-Corinth jutting up into the sky in the distance, and she identified the Bay of Salamis lying shimmering in the sun. She explained that one of the most decisive naval battles of history had been fought in that nearby bay. It was the battle between the Persians and the Greeks that wrested world supremacy from the hands of the Persians and placed it firmly in the grip of Greece. Also, it secured our civilization for Western culture instead of Eastern and Oriental influence. But even more important for a Christian is the fact that the Battle of Salamis forms a part of the background of the book of Esther in the Bible. As our guide described the importance of the Greek victory, my mind struggles to remember something I had read about that battle. I came home and began a bit of research. This is what I found.

Herodotus, the father of ancient history, has a graphic description of the tactic the Greeks employed in surprisingly gaining victory at the Battle of Salamis. They built some small warships known as "triremes," noted for their three tiers of short oars. They equipped the pointed prow of the boats with sharp metal blades. When they entered the battle, they maneuvered rapidly around the larger and slower Persian warships. They quickly pressed in close to the hulls of the enemy ships and sheered off the oars that propelled the Persian boats. When one side of the sets of oars was gone, the big boats went in circles, and the Greeks then sheered away the remaining oars with relative ease. With their oars gone, the boats were *carried along* by the winds and the prevailing currents. This is a picture of the word that is used in defining the role of the Holy Spirit in originating the Bible. "Men spoke from God as they were *carried along* by the Holy Spirit!"

One last technicality from this text — and *how important it is!* The word translated "moved" is a present passive participle. Dr. A. T. Robertson, undoubtedly the greatest Greek scholar ever to come from Baptist ranks, says that it literally means, "being moved from time to time." This is an all-important tidbit of interpretation. It gives rise to one of the most important truths with regard to the inspiration of Scripture. I might add, however, that this insight is decisively true without the support of this technicality of interpretation. One of the most important questions concerning the inspiration of Scripture is this: Where does inspiration terminate? On the *writers* or on the *writings*? In my judgment, this question is of far greater gravity than we have previously seen.

I quote from an article written by a prominent writer on "Fundamentals of the Faith" (I withhold his name to protect the *guilty!*). The article was published several years ago in numerous Baptist state papers. The article was entitled "What We Believe About the Bible." This quote is the last part of a rather lengthy paragraph: "No books will be added to the New Testament. No person this side of the eyewitnesses of the events can give the first-hand witness which is the mark of the New Testament. The writers were inspired; but this is not their uniqueness, for the Spirit of God continues to move in and upon the people of God. The uniqueness is in that these men who were borne along by the Holy Spirit also stood in the immediate presence of the once-for-all event which was accomplished in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Much of this statement is quite obviously true, but it betrays two very serious weaknesses as a statement concerning the inspiration of Scripture. First, the statement that “the Spirit of God continues to move in and upon the people of God” sounds as if the writer is making the quality of the Spirit’s work in a fellowship of Christians equal to the quality of the inspiration of Scripture. I cannot say how decidedly I disagree with that assessment! The Spirit’s inspiration of Scripture is protected by *infallibility* and *perfection*, but no movement of the Spirit of God among Christians is so protected. In a fellowship of believers, it is the Spirit’s intention to move upon them, but to work with them in their own *fallibility* and *imperfections*. So the writer does not distinguish between the quality of the Spirit’s inspiration of Scripture and the quality of the Spirit’s moving in a fellowship of believers.

Second, the writer’s statement about the Bible betrays that subtle weakness which is almost the hallmark of one of the “camps” which I referred to near the beginning of this message. “The writers were inspired.” With this I agree, but serious reservations must be made if this statement stands alone. The writers of Scripture were not continuously or even consistently inspired with the quality of inspiration that produced their contributions to the Bible. They were temporarily inspired with that peculiar quality of inspiration that produced their contributions to Scripture; they were “moved from time to time.” Peter could have written a *third* letter when he completed his two epistles which are included in the New Testament, and the third letter might not have had any of the quality of Holy Spirit inspiration that produced the two New Testament letters which bear his name. So the terminus of inspiration is upon the **writing, not the writers!** And again, the suggestion in the writer’s article that the Spirit of God “continues to move in and upon the people of God” in inspiration, presumably of the same quality that produced Scripture, is beyond my acceptance. The quality of the inspiration that produced my Bible is of a much high quality than the “inspiration” that this article and its message, or any message delivered today!

An implication of this message projects itself prominently into my attention. Many spokesmen for God today are content to preach the ideas gained from Scripture while practically ignoring the words of Scripture. You simply cannot have ideas without words. It is my personal conviction that we dishonor the Holy Spirit and do a deep disservice to men when we by-pass His very words and replace them with (paraphrase) ideas supposedly built upon those words. Dear pastor, preach the words of the Word! Explore, exegete, expose, explain, and exploit the marvelous words which God has selected to form His wonderful *Word!* Take your cue from Jesus, who exploited the subtlest intonations of the Old Testament, and from Paul, who built a whole doctrine of incarnation upon an inconspicuous use of the word “seed”, majoring on its singular use instead of the plural (Galatians 3:16). What warrant we have to look for “glory gleams” while turning a “verb-diamond” or a “noun-gem” in the Holy Spirit’s light. I’m sure our Father would not protest our looking for a lot when we open His Book! He keeps “breathing” — and talking — after His Book has gone to press! But never independently of the truth revealed in the Book. Always within the dimensions prescribed by the Book.

Immediately some may wish to protest, “But this limits God to a book!” Yes, but this “limit” is no limitation when you realize that it is an *unlimited Book!*

For the moment, this is enough treatment of the Inspiration of Scripture. Let’s turn now to another great feature in the nature and use of the Bible as the Word of God.

II. The ILLUMINATION of the Word

Second, we will consider the vital matter of the *illumination* of Scripture. You see, the same Spirit who *inspired* the Word must also *illuminate* and *interpret* the Word to the believing heart. The Bible says that “the things of the Spirit of God...are spiritually discerned” (I Cor. 2:14). Illumination, or immediate spiritual enlightenment and discernment, is what the old Puritans called “the giving of the eyes.” One of their spokesmen said, “When I was converted, God issued me a new set of eyes, and He has been opening those eyes ever since as I live dependently in His Word.”

There are two kinds of truth, *academic* (we might roughly call this kind “scientific” truth) and *spiritual*. Spiritual truth can never be grasped by the unaided intellect of man. Academic, scientific truth might basically be categorized as an “I-it” kind of truth, but spiritual truth is an “I-Thou” kind of truth. The Biblical word for academic truth is *gnosis*, while the word for spiritual truth is *epignosis*. “*Gnosis*” is knowing with the mind, while “*epignosis*” is a much deeper and fuller kind of knowledge. “*Epignosis*” is a *life-knowledge*, a knowing that comes through acquaintance and relationship. With regard to the Bible, human intelligence (*gnosis*) gives you *your* point of view about the Word, while Divine illumination and insight (*epignosis*) will give you *God’s* point of view about the Word. God’s thoughts belong to the world of spirit; man’s thoughts belong to the world of intellect. Spirit can embrace intellect, but intellect alone cannot apprehend spirit. Therefore, inspiration is necessary if God is to communicate His Word to us, and illumination is necessary if we are to properly receive and understand it.

What is the relationship between inspiration and illumination? Inspiration is both objective (produces the Bible) and subjective (through many individual writers), but it *terminates* on the *written revelation, the Bible*. Illumination is *also* objective (the Spirit utilizes the Bible) and subjective (the Spirit enlightens the mind and heart of the reader), but in this case, it *terminates* on a concurrence, a joining, a *union of the Spirit and the Word in the heart* of the humble, hungry reader, producing within the spiritual Christian a relevant perception of the written revelation. God *breathed out* the Scriptures — this is *inspiration*; God *breathes into* the Scriptures and upon our hearts — this is *illumination*.

Let’s look more closely now into the matter of illumination. The Psalmist’s prayer, “Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Law” (Psalm 119:18) is a perfect request for illumination. Illumination is beautifully pictured in Luke 24 in the Emmaus Road conversation between Jesus and two anonymous disciples on the afternoon of the resurrection. The two were walking sadly from Jerusalem to Emmaus. “And they talked together of all these things which had happened (concerning the crucifixion and death of Jesus). And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them” As He began to converse with them, how things began to “open up”! Before this journey began, this chapter records *the Opening of the Tomb* to reveal Christ’s resurrection from the dead. Then, in verse 31, *He opened the eyes* of these two disciples that they might recognize Him. In verse 32, they testified that their hearts burned within them, while He talked with them in the way, and while *He opened to them the Scriptures*. Later in the same chapter and on the same day, verse 45 says, “Then *opened He their understanding* that they might *understand the Scriptures*.” What a perfect picture of illumination! This is absolutely indispensable each time a believer approaches the Bible if He is to understand God’s mind in God’s Word.

In Ephesians 1:16-19, one of Paul’s great prayers is recorded. It is essentially a request that the Ephesian Christians might receive a deeper and fuller illumination of the Holy Spirit. Paul writes, I pray “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: The eyes of your understanding (*kardia*, which actually means “heart”) being enlightened; that ye may know” Again, what a perfect picture of illumination!

Suppose you walk to a hilltop on a clear night and find several men there, gazing up at the stars. You ask, "What are you doing?" One replies, "We are counting the stars, and making a map of them." You say, "Come with me, and I will show you more stars than you can imagine. Come into this observatory and put your eye to the lens of a telescope." "What!" they exclaim. "You want us to leave the vast sweep of the heavens and peer through a one-inch piece of glass?" Exactly! If they will cease to view the heavens with the naked eye and confine themselves to the lens of a telescope, they will learn more than they ever knew before about the stars. If you in the spiritual realm will leave the little hilltop of your natural point of view and submit to the Word of God, depending completely on the Holy Spirit, God will give you supernatural vision to see into all that He has placed before you in His Word.

One of my favorite Scripture stories is the story of the "man born blind" in John 9. When Jesus entered Jerusalem with His disciples, they "encountered" a "man who was blind from his birth." The disciples saw him only as an object for theological discussion, debate, and controversy. But Jesus regarded him (He always regards individuals this way) as a subject for "the works of God to be made manifest in him." Then Jesus did and said some things that are absolutely bewildering (without illumination!). He leaned down, "spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which is by interpretation, Sent). He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing."

Perhaps the best key to unlock this baffling account is found in the meaning of the miracles recorded in the Gospel of John. All the miracles in John's Gospel are called "semeia" or "signs." They are events that actually happened, to be sure, but each points to (sign-ifies) something beyond itself. Each miracle is a parable of Divine wisdom! When Jesus put the moist clay in the man's eyes, He was saying in effect, "Men suffer from a deeper and darker blindness than the mere deprivation of physical sight. This is why men are *really* blind. Men do not see — God, glory, grace, reality, and eternity -- because their eyes are *closed up with earth*! They are earth-bound and earth-blinded!" You see, you can take two thin dimes and totally blot out the light of the sun, if you strategically place them over the eyes of the observer. Men are blind to God because they are occupied with the "cares of this world."

Then, Jesus told this man to "go and wash in the pool of Siloam (which is by interpretation, Sent)." What does this mean? The pool of Siloam was a pool of water near the Temple area in southwest Jerusalem. Note again that "Siloam" means "Sent." The word "sent" is one of the prominent words of the Gospel of John. Sixty-two times, the word "sent" is used in John's Gospel, and it refers either to *the Father sending the Son*, or *the Son sending the Spirit*, or *the Spirit sending the saint*, on God's appointed mission. However, it is most widely employed to refer to Jesus. Seventeen times in the first nine chapters of the Gospel of John, Jesus is referred to by this title. Every time He was asked, "Where are you from?" His reply was simply, "Sent!" Every time He was asked, "Why are you here?" His answer again was, "Sent!" *He* is the *substance* of which the Pool of Siloam was only the *shadow*. It is as if Jesus had said, "If men are ever to get rid of their earth-blindness, it will be necessary for each of them to come to Me and let Me *wash it out of their eyes!*" When the man went to Siloam and washed, he came away seeing. Even so, the earth-blinded sinner will truly *see* only as He comes to Christ and has his blindness removed and his sight restored. And the earth-bound saint will have his eyes opened to the glories of God's Word only as he faithfully, dependently comes to Christ and is treated with the eyesalve of the Spirit.

When I was pastor of the Cherokee Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, the church had a tough-minded but tender-hearted deacon named Bill Baskin. Bill managed a building crew in a construction business. One year just a few days before Christmas, he was directing a project on a

construction site. He had stopped the traffic on the nearby street to allow a heavy construction vehicle to move up onto the highway. As it came up a slope that was covered with gravel, the fast-spinning wheels picked up a tiny piece of metal or a tiny stone and sent it at high speed through the air. The tiny object struck Bill squarely in his right eye. He fell backward to the pavement, his eye pouring blood. Some of his men rushed to him, and he directed them to put him in a small truck and rush him to the hospital. As quickly as possible, the hospital attendants treated the eye, stopped the bleeding and applied the necessary medical aid. Then a slow wait began. The doctors hoped to save the eye, but everything was doubtful for several days. Then, several days after Christmas, they abandoned hope and removed the damaged eye. Sometime later, Bill and his wife went to an optometrist's office so that he could be fitted with an artificial eye and with special glasses that would compensate for the extra load now placed on his one remaining good eye. The doctor began to flash the usual examination charts on the screen, saying, "When you get to the place where you cannot see one of these charts as well as the last one, tell me." After several charts, Bill said, "Doctor, I'm not sure about this one. Put the other one back up there, and let me compare the last two charts again." Because he continued to be undecided, he asked the optometrist to alternate the charts several times. His wife, Margaret, who was sitting quietly nearby, finally said with a laugh, "Well, I'm glad to see that someone else has trouble making up his mind about difficult decisions!" Whereupon the doctor turned on the overhead light, raised his finger, and said, "That's a good point! The *fact* is, we don't *see* with our *eyes* at all! We *see* with our *minds*. We only *look* with our eyes!" Now, a Christian sees with an altogether different "set of eyes," and unless God illumines His Word and enlightens those eyes, even His child may look into the Word all day long and seldom *see*!

The story of Joseph in Genesis 41 contains a perfect illustration of illumination. The wise men and magicians of Egypt couldn't "see into" a certain matter, but Joseph did. "And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, 'I have dreamed a dream, and there is none who can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it.' And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, '*It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.*'" "And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, 'Forasmuch as *God hath showed thee all this*, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art.'" When a believer in Christ walks in the Spirit and lives in the Word of God, he becomes just such a man of wisdom and understanding.

In the year 1647, one of the most important gatherings in Christian history was held in Scotland. It was the famous Westminster Assembly, a great gathering of spiritual leaders which was charged with the task of framing a charter for the Protestant reform movement in the British Isles. Out of this Assembly came the great "Westminster Confession of Faith" and the "Shorter Catechism" of the Presbyterian Church. But there was a grave threat to the Assembly presented by representatives of the "Erastian party," a group of scholarly men who wanted to obliterate all lines, where possible, between the church and the state, and establish a strong church-state relationship. This view was ardently opposed by several Assembly leaders, but there was an additional problem. The Erastian view was advanced by Dr. John Selden, one of the greatest scholars in Christendom in that day, and the opposition did not seem to have a leader who could match his skill of mind and speech. After he had spoken powerfully in favor of the Erastian view, the conservative Presbyterians seemed to be at a total loss as to how to defend their view against Selden's brilliant arguments. Then unexpectedly there rose up in the meeting a Godly young Scotsman named George Gillespie, one of the youngest members of the entire Assembly. After securing permission to address the body, he spoke for an hour against the heresy in a most powerful and effective manner. Dr. Selden later admitted that Gillespie's speech had swept away in one hour the work of ten years of his life. When the speech was over, Gillespie returned to his seat, exhausted. Several of his friends crowded around to congratulate him, and several reached for the notebook that he had placed in front of him as he spoke, thinking they would find his outline and the polished notes of his masterful argument. Instead, on the page they found nothing but one little sentence, penned over and over and over again as he sat in his seat before asking to speak. The brief phrase covered the page: "Give light, O Lord; give light, O Lord; give light, O Lord." Dear friends, this must be the deep, ceaseless cry of our needy hearts as we turn to God's Word: "Give light, O Lord, give light!" We must not have a Bible that is not Spirit-related, and we must not have a Holy Spirit who is not Bible-related. To have the Word without the Spirit is equal to having rails laid, and the locomotive on them, but without any power to propel them. On the other hand, to have the Spirit without the Word, is to have the power which propels, but no rails to guide. We must have a Bible-related Holy Spirit, and a Spirit-related Bible.

Several years ago, I and three other Christians went to mid-state New York for an evangelistic crusade. Four tiny churches cooperated there, and we saw 47 people come to receive Christ that week. The morning meetings each day were held in a small church building in the tiny village of Stockbridge, New York. As I went into the auditorium of the church each morning, I noticed four unusual pictures of Jesus Christ on the walls of the room. Two were on the left wall and two on the right wall, with one at the front and one at the back of each wall. One morning, I walked over to one of the pictures to get a closer look. I made a fascinating discovery! It was a bust picture of Jesus, created by the entire Gospel of Matthew in tiny letters forming the picture. The tiny letters and words were placed closely together, making the facial countenance of our Saviour. I hurried around the room to investigate the other three pictures. Sure enough, the second one was the Gospel of Mark forming a *different* picture of Jesus. The third was Luke's Gospel and the fourth was the Gospel of John, each forming a unique picture of Jesus created by the words of that Gospel. I shall never forget those four pictures! I only wish that someone would do the same thing with each book of the Bible. After all, the whole Bible is a portrait of Jesus.

The Old Testament forms the background. The background of a portrait is full of shades and shadows and many dark lines, all designed to accentuate the central figure. The Old Testament is exactly like that. It has many shades and shadows and dark lines, and every page of it points to Christ and accentuates Him as the Central Figure. The four Gospels, in turn, present the actual “face” of the figure, so that we can recognize the clear contours of His countenance. The rest of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles, and the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, reveal the “garments of glory” worn by the Central Figure of the portrait. This is the final and most important purpose of illumination. When this occurs, the print “fades” as I read the Word of God, and the Person “emerges,” and God “shines in my hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 4:6). This is true and full illumination.

“Come, Holy Ghost, for moved by Thee The prophets wrote and spoke;
Unlock the truth, Thyself the key, Unseal the sacred Book.”

III. The INCARNATION of the Word of God

Third, we will consider the vital matter of the *incarnation* of the Word of God. Incarnation means “in-flesh-ment.” When Jesus was born at Bethlehem, this was the incarnation of God in our humanity; not the Deifying of man (the elevation of man into Godhood), but the humanizing of God (the stooping of God into manhood). The Bible says, “The Word (the *Logos*, the “logic” of God, Jesus — John 1:1-3) became flesh.” In that moment, God became something He had never *been* before! God afforded Himself a new experience! For the first time in His Eternal Existence, the Almighty God could look through human eyes, touch through human fingertips, walk on human feet, kneel on human knees, and speak through human lips. God suddenly became a “thing” (see Luke 1:35). He came out of the Everywhere into the Here; He got definite with us at Bethlehem! The Infinite became the Intimate; the Most High became the Most Nigh. And He became “flesh,” which is a typical Biblical word for man at his *lowest*. When God came down in the birth of Jesus, He came *all the way down!* “One awful night, God walked down the stairs of Heaven with a Baby in His arms, and deposited that Baby in a catteltrough in a cowshed, among animal droppings — in Bethlehem of Judea.”

But He didn’t stay “cribbed”! He was “Crossed,” and “Coffined and Crypted” in death, but He didn’t stay there, either! He disturbed Death to death, and burst out of it in Resurrection Glory! He is alive today, and true to His Word, He is exactly where He said He would be. In the Presence of the Holy Spirit, “Christ’s Other Self,” He is with us and in us.

What is this really all about? God established a principle, God set a precedent, God modeled a procedure, in the coming of Jesus. His “Word-made-flesh” idea is to go on and on until the end of history. The procedure is simply, “Word to flesh to word to flesh to word to flesh” until God rings down the final curtain. With the awful modification created by my sins, my life is to be a Container and a Conveyor, a “Carrier” of the very life of Jesus Himself. When I heard the preached word of the Gospel, which was based on the printed Word of God, the Personal Word of God, Jesus, became real to me! I received Him into my “flesh,” my humanity (it must have been for Him a kind of repeat of Bethlehem’s birth into a filthy stable), and He literally came to live in me. So my life becomes a greatly modified continuation of His incarnation. And now, living in me, He wants to expose, exhibit, and express His continuing Life — right through me! This is a glorious part of the Heavenly Genius of the Gospel of Christ.

But this creates a question: why, then, do most professing Christians seldom re-present Christ, but instead, they show only themselves? A part of the answer is that this “Word-made-flesh” life must be daily and dynamically sustained by live and vital communication with God through His inspired and

illuminated Word. And most believers apparently do not have such daily, dynamic sustenance. What can be done about this dread deficiency? I want to propose some corrective steps to enhance the incarnation of the Living Word in His people by means of the Written Word, the Bible.

First, every Christian should have *consistent exposure* to the Word of God. Hudson Taylor, a giant for God, said, “Your spiritual growth will occur in exact proportion to the amount of time you spend in the Word of God.” Though there are other implications at this point which need to be explained, I believe this to be perfectly true. You, dear child of God, should capitalize on every available opportunity to hear the Word of God, and you should create your own opportunities for daily communion with God in His Word.

Second, every Christian should practice *careful listening* to the Word of God. This will require disciplined attention, reception, and retention when we are hearing or studying the Word of God. I seek to practice “spiritual personality projection” when I hear or read the Word, asking the Holy Spirit to enable me to *see myself* in the situations and truths of His Word. Also, I ask Him to “internalize” the truths received, a major step toward the incarnation of the Word. I have already mentioned the retention of the Word. This is vital! Write down what God says to mem and study it over and over again. Keep a notebook of His truths which He has given to you.

Years ago, a renowned English preacher named Basil Matthews was in a Bible Conference in Calvary Baptist Church of New York City. He shared the speaking assignments with an Indian preacher from the western United States. As the conference days passed, the two preachers developed a friendship and began to share fellowship in the Lord. One afternoon, they were walking from the church back to their hotel after a conference session. The wide street was crowded with several lanes of traffic. Suddenly, the Indian stopped on the sidewalk and said, “I hear a cricket!” Basil Matthews stood beside him, bewildered by this announcement. The Indian turned, went to the nearby corner, and crossed the wide street with Matthews following close behind. Suddenly the Indian stopped. They were in front of a flower shop, directly across the street from the spot where the strange announcement had been made. The Indian preacher entered the shop with Basil Matthews following him. The Indian stopped in front of a row of pot plants and listened. Suddenly he thrust his hand into one of the plants, and pulled out a cricket. A moment later, the two of them emerged from the shop together. The amazed Matthews said, “How in the world did you do that?” The Indian quietly replied, “Sir, I learned long ago that people hear what they *want* to hear.” To prove his point, he took two half-dollars out of his pocket and threw them down on the sidewalk. Matthews later said that four people changed their direction and dived toward the money!

The question is not, “Does God speak?” The question is, “Do men listen?” Do *you* listen for the voice of God every day? How *well* do you listen? What discipline and responsibility are involved! No wonder Jesus said again and again, “He who has ears, let him hear,” and “Be careful how you hear!”

Third, every Christian should seek to practice *complete obedience* of what God says in His Word. A familiar passage tells us to “be doers of the Word, and not hearers only. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass (mirror): for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.” But sadly, we have arrived at a time in which most believers apparently equate hearing and doing, as if the entire matter were finished when we do God the favor of listening to a sermon or casually reading the Bible for a few minutes! This may give private devotional enrichment, but it is far short of the incarnation of Jesus that God is looking for.

Dr. J. M. Price, a great Christian educator, often said, “The best binding for the Bible is not morocco leather; it’s a human skin.” Until the Word is walking around again in me, God’s will is not being done.

An old Buddhist legend tells of how Quanon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy, was showing a recent arrival in the Buddhist “heaven” around the premises. In the tour, they came to a large building. When they entered, a strange sight spread before the newcomer. The place was like a large library with many shelves, all of them filled with small, shriveled articles that looked like prunes. “What are those things?” asked the new arrival. “They are human ears,” replied Quanon. “Human ears? What does it mean?” Quanon replied, “These are the ears of people who regularly heard the truth while they were on earth, but they never did anything about it. So, when they died, their ears came on to heaven, but the rest of each person went to hell!” Dear friend, what would happen — what *would* happen — if that standard were applied by God to the average attendant in our churches? There would probably be many, many bodiless ears in heaven, and many, many earless bodies in hell! How many disobediences have accumulated in your life over the years by hearing the Word of God with no obedient response to its directions and its demands? So Jesus is hidden *within* us without expression and exposure *through* us! What directive does He wish me to obey right now?

Finally, every Christian should make *constant confession* of the truths God is revealing in His Word. It is impossible to overstate the importance of this step. And how this has been overlooked in the typical Christian life. Many people come into our church buildings Sunday after Sunday, and they are no more an influence for God now than they were 25 or 35 years ago, when they were first saved. Why? Is it because they are indecent, or flagrant sinners, or that they do not believe what they are told? Probably not. The real reason in most cases is that they hear God’s truth — once, and again, and again, and again — and never repeat it, never speak it, never declare it, never tell it! They don’t even talk about it with their closest friends and nearest loved ones. So a vast and vital dimension of the Gospel and the Christian life is totally closed to them. I believe this with all my heart: the quality of a believer’s Christian life will never rise above his vocal confession of Jesus Christ and His truth! And the other side is also true: a Christian will always rise up to follow his confession of Christ and His truth, so that the quality of the Christian’s life is largely determined by his spoken celebration of the truth of God.

Someone asked Phillips Brooks, the great Boston preacher, the secret of his great church. His answer was certainly peculiar. He said, “I preach a sermon on Sunday, and 500 people repeat it as many times as they can, to as many people as will listen, all week long.” Can we see the validity of that? The greatest benefit is not to the persons who heard all those repetitions, but rather to the persons who initially heard the truth — *and then repeated it over and over*. With each repetition, God materialized a greater incarnation of His Word in the life of His child.

So here is the value and vitality of the Word of God to the individual Christian, and the vocation of “in-fleshing” it in his inner life and before the world. Every believer who has had long experience with the living Word of God communicated through the written Word of God would happily testify that “the closer the look, the greater the Book.” John Wesley expressed the sentiment of the faith-walking Christian when he prayed, “Oh God, let me be mastered *by* that Book, and let me be the master *of* that Book.” Oh, that this were true of me — and of every believer in Christ!

3562 Marconi Cove - Memphis, TN 38118
901-362-1622 E-mail: herbslm@mindspring.com

16 All Scripture is inspired (God-breath) by God and profitable for (4 things) teaching (imparting the truth), for reproof (rebuke, convicting a person), for correction (restoring a person to that which is right from that which is wrong), for training (child-training) in righteousness;

Guy King “the Bible guides our forward steps - it is profitable for doctrine; guides our false steps -profitable for reproof; guides our faltering steps - profitable for correction; and guides our first and final step and every step in between - profitable for training.

17 that the man (as opposed to an immature infant child of God) of God may be adequate (fitted, or suited like a joint in the arm) equipped (outfitted like a boat in the harbor waiting to go out) for every good work.

NASB