



e-devotional

A monthly devotional on the spiritual formation of Christian workers
January 2004

Mandatory Disciplines: The Word

Scripture: Joshua 1:8; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21

Task: Take time to read Psalm 119 and note how many different terms are used to refer to God's Word. Then write down what the psalmist states we are to do with the Word and finally, the benefits the Word brings to those who meditate and subject themselves to it.

In the seventies and eighties a boiling ferment about the Bible engaged seminaries and theologians. A best seller during that time was *The Battle for the Bible* by Harold Lindsell.

Scholars who want to study ancient copies of Plato's *Tetralogies* today can choose from only seven extant manuscripts. In contrast, ancient copies of the New Testament number 24,300 (*Servant*, 1996, p 8). This devotional discusses three words: revelation, inspiration, and illumination. These are familiar to all of us and those in the ordination track *must* be able to differentiate the terms.

The main idea of this devotional is that God has revealed to humanity truth that could not otherwise be known. That truth is recorded in the Bible, which though written by men, is the inspired Word of God. Obedient believers are illumined by the Holy Spirit to understand the Bible.

I. Revelation

A. General Revelation

Author and theologian, Merrill Unger defined revelation as God making "known to men truths and realities which they could not discover for themselves" (*Bible Dictionary*). Revelation is about the origin of divine truth. Both the Hebrew and Greek words express the idea of uncovering or unveiling. As one writer expressed it, revelation is "a divine disclosure".

Revelation is composed of general revelation and special revelation. General revelation refers to the truth that God has made known to all humanity, primitive and cultured. That knowledge is known in nature, in humankind, and in the development of history.

The psalmist wrote in Psalm 19:1—"The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament is declaring the work of His hands." God's saving acts of judgment upon Egypt to deliver his people from slavery were a revelation of the kind of God that he is. He has power over political structures and controls the movement of history. History is "his story" for God is the prime mover in the affairs of humankind.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used God's provision of food for birds and beauty for the lily of the field to illustrate the character of the heavenly Father.

B. Special Revelation

Because of the effect of humanity's fall and subsequent spiritual darkness, a special revelation of God was necessary. The Bible and God's redemptive work in Christ were God's communication of himself to humanity.

Hebrews 1:1-3 states this special revelation. "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."

Pastors of the Christian and Missionary Alliance are to be men of the "Book". It is the basis of our belief and behavioral system. If a "seeker" is to come into a dynamic and true encounter with his or her Savior and Lord, it will be through the pages of the Word. This devotional centers on its validity and role.

These verses can be condensed into three words: "God has spoken." In former times he spoke in a variety of ways: by angels as to Abraham; by dreams as with Daniel; by visions as with Isaiah; by miracles as with Elijah, Elisha and Jonah; by nature as David wrote in Psalm 19.

These were all incomplete in revealing the essential person and redemptive heart of God. For that, God sent his Son as the final revelation.

II. Inspiration

A. The Doctrine of Inspiration Defined

Reformed theologian, B. B. Warfield wrote that inspiration is "a supernatural influence exerted on the sacred writers by the Spirit of God, by virtue of which their writings are given divine trustworthiness."

This definition emphasizes the inspiration of the men who wrote the Scriptures. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 speaks of the writings themselves. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."



Inspiration literally means 'God breathed'. The implicit statement is that the Scriptures are of value in doctrine, reproof, correction and training in righteousness **because**, to the very word, the Bible is the product of God himself.

Peter, in 2 Peter 1:19-21 emphasized the process in which man is the instrument acted upon by the Holy Spirit.

"And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

There are three important points to note:

- God is the cause moving upon or carrying the writer.

- Men are the agents acted upon. They were holy men, chosen of God and separated to this specific task.
- The result of those two factors was the Scriptures as “a written revelation once for all given, thoroughly accredited and attested by miracle and fulfilled prophecy” (MFU).

B. A Theological View of Inspiration

1. The *Liberal or modernistic* view states the Bible “contains the Word of God.” This position holds to an illumination theory and states that God gave pious men insight into his truth that they recorded much like he does today. In addition, intuition was a part of inspiration. Intuition was the occasional heightening of natural religious insight in discovering divine truth.

The problem and error of this position includes a wrong base that makes man the most active agent while God is passive. It is man-centered with human reason the judge. It is a non-biblical view.

2. The *neo-orthodox* view holds the Bible “becomes the Word of God” as the reader interacts with it. This is an existential position that accepts the conclusions of higher criticism that the Bible has many errors. The imperfect words of men become the perfect words of God as God personally encounters individuals in what would essentially be a revelation. Post-modern thinkers walk essentially the same path that makes the reader the determiner of truth.

Some Bible Facts...

- It makes claim over 4,000 times to be the Word of God—“God said,” or its equivalent
- 66 books written over a period of 1600 years by over 40 different authors, none of whom corroborated in writing. Its message is a unified and harmonious presentation of God, his work and purpose. This is unequalled in literature.
- It has survived the attacks of antagonists for 2,000 years. Voltaire claimed the Bible would be extinct in 100 years—who was Voltaire?

Neo-orthodoxy also sought to ‘demythologize’ the Bible; i.e., strip the Bible of cultural trappings in order to get the core of truth in it. German theologian, Rudolph Bultmann articulated this position, after W.W.II. Bultmann was convinced that modern science would not allow the contemporary person to accept miracles, the fall of man, virgin birth, and Jesus’ resurrection. So he classified all of these things as myths. They weren’t really true, but it was the best way those men had to write about their experiences. The job of the modern scholar, he said, is to discover

what truth or meaning those myths relates (Clark Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, 219; G. L. Borchert, *Ev. Dict. Theo*, 309).

A central problem with neoorthodox views is that one cannot take out historical or scientific data from the Bible and arrive at truth. If simple historical facts are wrong, how can the spiritual messages be considered right?

Language is not perfect nor is humanity infallible. In spite of this, we hold that the original autographs were without error and the language was fully adequate to express the truth of God and all that God desired to communicate to his creation.

3. *Conservative* views fall into three categories:

- Dictation inspiration states the writers were essentially secretaries.
- Dynamic inspiration holds that the concepts were inspired, but not the words. God suggested thoughts only, giving freedom of personality and literary form.
- Verbal plenary inspiration states the Holy Spirit led to the choice of the very words. Plenary means that in the whole and in all parts, God gave full expression to his thought in the words of the biblical record. "He guided in the very choice of words used within the personality and the cultural complex of the writers so that in some inscrutable manner, the Bible is the word of God while being the words of men" (Norman Geisler on the Trinity).

It is essential that we hold to verbal inspiration because of the statements of the Bible.

1 Kings 16:1—"The word of the LORD came to Jehu against Baasha saying...."

Jeremiah 13:1—"Thus the LORD said to me."

Ezekiel 1:3—"The word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel."

Verbal inspiration is essential linguistically. Words are necessary to the expression of thought and to communication. Without words it could scarcely be stated that communication had taken place between God and the writer.

Truth is truth. There are not degrees of truth. Either the record is inspired or not inspired, of God or not of God.

If we say that the original autographs were inerrant we must also say that the copies and translations we have today are fully adequate for us to know and to understand what God has revealed to us.

III. Illumination

1 Corinthians 2:13-14 reads: "This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Illumination is God teaching the obedient believer what he has revealed in his Word. When we gain an insight into a passage of Scripture, it isn't a revelation it is illumination. Revelation has to do with origins. Inspiration tells us how God's Word was received and recorded. Illumination describes how the human being understands and comprehends God's revelation.

Conclusion

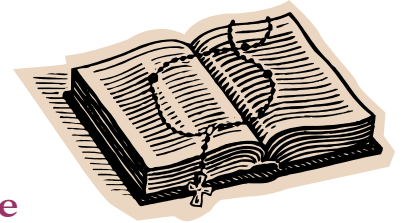
James Orr wrote early in this century that the theological battle of the century "will have to be fought...round the fortress of the worth and authority of the Holy Scripture." He proved to be very accurate in his prophecy.

Kay Arthur wrote in a donor letter of October, 1996 (p 2): "Today the trends in much of evangelical Christianity are 'prayer,' 'world evangelization by the year 2000,' and 'revival.' I do not mean to diminish their importance in any way. Each is

biblical and vital. In fact, prayer and the evangelization of the world are mandatory. However, my concern is that we may be trying to build a magnificent work under the leadership of God apart from laying the one and only foundation which will guarantee Christianity's stability and endurance—the Word of God. Are we assuming people know the Word of God, have enough of the Word of God? Are we substituting man's way, man's evaluations, man's concepts, man's solutions, man's strategies for God's? And if so, where will it lead us as individuals, as families, as a church, as a nation? Could we become the devil's tool, as the church was Hitler's tool?"

Ravi Zacharias' wrote in *Deliver Us From Evil*, that the church itself was a primary source in undercutting the moral authority of our day. Theologians attacking the reliability and authority of the Bible set the stage for secularism to throw out the moral mandates of the Bible. With that action came the fall of our culture and the explosion of evil.

As ministers of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, we must stand without hesitancy upon the rock of the inerrancy of the Scriptures and therefore submit to their commanding authority. It ought to be quite plain that the primary tool in Christian spiritual formation is the Bible. There can be no significant conforming to Christ the living Word, unless there is consistent exposure to and obedient submission to the written Word.



Abraham Lincoln: "I believe the Bible is the best gift God has ever given to man. All the good from the Saviour of the world is communicated to us through this book."

George Washington: "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."

Goethe: "Let mental culture go on advancing, let the natural sciences progress in ever greater extent and depth, and the human mind widen itself as much as it desires; beyond the elevation and moral culture of Christianity, as it shines forth in the Gospels, it will not go."

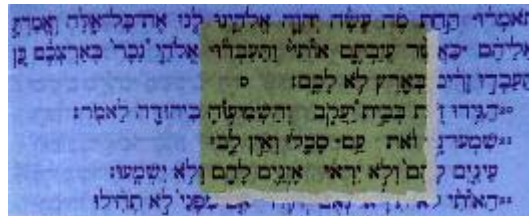
A. W. Tozer: "The Bible is a life-bringing and a life-giving book. It is not primarily concerned with any department of human thought for its own sake. If the Bible speaks about the rainbow, it is that we may be reminded of God's covenant of mercy with mankind. If it tells the story of Abraham, it does so that we may learn the place of faith in our relation to God. If it points us to the moon and the stars, it is that we may know how frail we are. If it talks about the birds, it is to teach us to trust our heavenly Father without fear or doubting. It tells us about hell not to satisfy our

morbid curiosity, but that we may steer our feet far from its terrors. It tells us about heaven that we may be prepared to enter there. It writes the history of human disgrace that we may learn the value of divine grace. It warns in order that it may turn our feet away from the paths that go down to the path of destruction. It rebukes in order that we may see our own faults and be delivered from them" ("The A. W. Tozer Anthology, *Alliance Life*, October 26, 1988, 14).

From...

National Bible Association Website

Portions of the Bible Are Now in 2,233 of the 6,500 Languages in the World



Portion of a Hebrew scroll

The National Bible Association's singular mission is to "encourage everyone to read the Bible." But if the Bible is not in the language of the people, it is much more difficult for them to read it. That is why the Association works so closely with the various national, regional and state Bible societies in the United States who in turn work with the [United Bible Societies](#), which is headquartered in Reading, England.

As of December 31, 1999, portions or all of the Bible had been translated into 2,233 of the more than **6,500 languages in the world**,¹ according to [United Bible Societies' Scripture Language Report 1999](#).

Through sponsorship of translations and assistance to translators, the United Bible Societies makes the Scriptures more accessible to people of different nations and cultures. [Currently there are Scripture translation projects underway in some 685 languages](#) that receive technical help and advice from the United Bible Societies' highly-qualified team of translation consultants. Many of these projects also receive direct financial support from the United Bible Societies.

Some part of the Bible is being translated for the first time in 468 languages. In many of the rest, where older Bible versions already exist, new translations are being prepared in clear, modern language that is easily understandable to today's readers. Over the last two hundred years, there has been [an incredible growth in the number of languages in which Scriptures are available](#).

[<http://www.nationalbible.org/atb/features/atbubstran00.htm>]

The Bible in America Today

- ▶ 1. The Bible is the perennial best seller. If the Bible were included in the "Best Sellers List" it would always be number one.
- ▶ 2. Nine out of ten Americans report in various surveys that they have a Bible in their home.
- ▶ 3. Surveys also show that just over 15% of the nation's population regularly reads the Bible. That is up from 10% in the 1940's.
- ▶ 4. The desire to produce educated religious leaders was the impetus for the founding of the nation's first colleges. The goal of educating every person so that he or she could read the Bible played a decisive role in the establishing of universal public education.
- ▶ 5. For many people it is simply "the Good Book". Their family's history is recorded in it. Their parents and grandparents very possibly read no other book after they finished school. The Bible became such an integral part of the heartland of the nation that to this day it is know as the "Bible Belt".
- ▶ 6. The majority of Americans believe the Bible to be the Word of God. Among those who do not believe it to be the Word of God, many still recognize it as the basis for our laws, the source of our sense of justice and charity, and the inspiration for much of our literature, art and music, as well as being great literature itself.
- ▶ 7. While parents may be divided on the issue of prayer in the schools, the great majority have no objection to instruction about major religions, elective Bible courses, the use of the Bible in secular courses, ([see "The Bible & Public Schools"](#)), [release time \(off campus\) Bible instruction](#), and the after-hours use of public school facilities by students for Bible clubs.
- ▶ 8. One in three Americans believes that "holding the Bible to be God's truth is absolutely necessary for someone to truly know God".
- ▶ 9. Four in ten Americans say they would turn first to the Bible to test their own religious beliefs. [<http://www.nationalbible.org/atb/atbiatoday1.htm>]



time for...

humor

"This is a collection of 'Student Bloopers' gathered together by Richard Lederer of St. Paul School and he states: 'One of the fringes benefits of being an English or History teacher is receiving the occasional jewel of a student blooper in an essay. I have pasted together the following 'history' of the world from certifiably genuine student bloopers collected by teachers throughout the United States, from eighth grade through college level. Read carefully and you will learn a lot.

"The inhabitants of ancient Egypt were called mummies. They lived in the Sarah Dessert and traveled by Camelot. The climate of the Sarah is such that the inhabitants have to live elsewhere, so certain areas of the dessert are cultivated by irritation. The Egyptians built the Pyramids in the shape of a huge triangular cube. The Pyramids are a range of mountains between France and Spain.

"The Bible is full of interesting caricatures. In the first book of the Bible, Guinnesses, Adam and Eve were created from an apple tree. One of their children Cain, once asked, 'Am I my brother's son?' God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Montezuma. Jacob, son of Isaac, stole his brother's birth mark. Jacob wa a patriarch who brought up his twelve sons to be patriarchs, but they did not take to it. One of Jacob's sons, Joseph, gave refuse to the Israelites.

"Pharaoh forced the Hebrew slaves to make bread without straw. Moses led them to the Red Sea, where they made unleavened bread, which is bread made without ingredients. Afterwards, Moses went up on Mount Cyanide to get the ten commandments. David was a Hebrew king skilled at playing the liar. He fought with the Philatelists, a race people who lived in Bibical tiems. Solomon, one of David's sons, had 500 wives and 500 porcupines" [from *Rotary Magazine* sometime in 1988 or 89).