

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

## Video Lecture Series

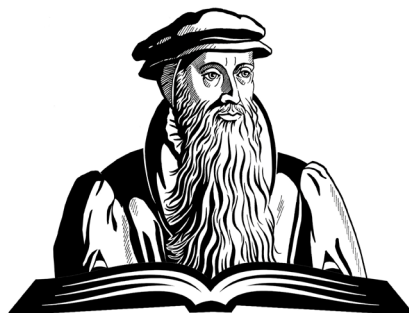
by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

*Module 1:*

### INTRODUCTION and THE DOCTRINE OF FIRST PRINCIPLES

*Lecture 5*

### THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE



The John Knox Institute  
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*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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### *Module 1 ~ Lecture 5*

*Introduction:*

1. Methodology
2. Creeds and Confessions

*The Doctrine of First Principles:*

3. Scripture
4. Revelation
- 5. The Inspiration of Scripture**
6. Properties of Inspired Scripture
7. The Canon of Holy Scripture
8. Preservation and Translation of Scripture
9. Interpretation of Scripture
10. The Continuity of Scripture

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## *Module 1 ~ Lecture 5*

# THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

The devil constantly seeks to undermine and attack the Word of God. This was true from the very beginning. Remember what happened in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3. After God had spoken His Word to Adam and Eve—Satan immediately brought his “pseudo” word, or false word, to our first parents, tempting them to turn from what God had said to them. He questioned God’s Word by saying to Eve, “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” No, that is not what God had said. Satan twisted and distorted God’s words and then he flatly contradicted them. He said, “Ye shall not surely die.” If that was not enough, he went on to sow doubts in Eve’s mind by speaking lies to her about the character of God. He said, “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.”

Satan has maintained the same tactics ever since. He employed the identical attack on Christ 4,000 years later when he tempted Him in the wilderness. And Paul writes to the Corinthians, “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ,” 2 Corinthians 11:3. Generation after generation, the devil continues his relentless assault on the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures. This is the reason that it is essential that we understand the doctrine of Scripture and that we defend and maintain it with all our hearts.

We rightly speak of the Bible as the voice of God and the Word of God. That is because every word is inspired by God. The word “inspired” or “inspiration” means God-breathed. Just as we expel breath from our mouths, so, ultimately, God Himself is speaking in the Scriptures. God is the ultimate source of every word in the Bible. Since God is the author, the Scriptures are also inerrant, which means without errors, and infallible, which means it is never wrong, never able to fail.

In this first module on systematic theology, we are covering the doctrine of first principles, with special attention on the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures. In the previous lecture we considered the doctrine of general and special revelation. We now turn to the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. As in all of our lectures, we’ll be expounding this doctrine under four points. We’ll look at it scripturally, doctrinally, polemically, and practically.

So first of all, scripturally. In 2 Timothy 3:16–17 we read, “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.” Paul speaks of “all Scripture”—not some of it, or even most of it, but every bit of it—and he says that this Scripture is given to us by God Himself. We’ll consider the role of the human authors in a moment, but we

see here that behind everything else, God provides His own word to men, and He gives it by inspiration. It is God-breathed. God is the original author of all the words of Scripture. Consequently, the Bible has divine authority.

But you'll also notice in 2 Timothy 3 that this high doctrine comes with very practical implications. Since it is God's Word, it is highly "profitable," Paul says, for men. Indeed, there is no book that is more profitable in all the world and all of history. He says it is applicable to what we think and what we do. It is for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness. The believer is fully equipped by the Bible for all good works, or, as 2 Peter 1:3 says, "God has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness." Paul's words in 2 Timothy 3, therefore, introduce to us the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture.

But secondly, we need to consider a doctrinal exposition or overview of inspiration. Here we will expound some of the more detailed distinctions and categories that Scripture provides for us. So first of all, this doctrine is summarized in the Westminster Confession of Faith in chapter 1, both in paragraph 2 and in paragraph 4. In paragraph 2, the Westminster Confession lists the 66 books that comprise the Bible, thereby identifying and limiting what we mean by the content of Scripture, excluding other things. And it says this: "All which are given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life." Further, in paragraph 4, we read, "The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God."

We must begin by defining some important terms. We can speak of the plenary, verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, and each of these words carries weight of importance. So think about each of those words. First of all, we refer to plenary verbal inspiration. So the word plenary means that it is extending to all parts equally; that this inspiration extends to every part of the Bible; it is full, complete, absolute. For example, Jesus said in Matthew 5:18—this is the Sermon on the Mount—He says, "For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Now those two words—a "jot" is a reference to the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. It looks like just a small stroke. And a "tittle" is actually a little piece of a Hebrew letter. You might think of it as a little tail on the end of a letter. So the Lord is saying, right down into the very letters of the Bible, that all of them are upheld as the Word of God. So we have "plenary," which means that this inspiration extends to all the parts of the Bible.

The second word is "verbal"—plenary, verbal inspiration; and by "verbal," we mean that it was given in written words. So it is propositional. Proverbs 22:20–21 says, "Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth." Among other things, God provided Scripture in written words for their permanent preservation, which we'll consider in more detail in a future lecture.

The third word is "inspiration"—plenary, verbal inspiration. As we've already seen, that means "God-breathed." So we read in our Bibles over and over again the words, "Thus saith the Lord." God is obviously speaking to us and He's speaking to us through the Scripture. The ultimate origin of the Bible is God Himself.

And we can add two more words that we referred to earlier. As you probably know, the Old Testament was primarily written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. And the inspiration of the Bible applies to these original autographs, the original Hebrew and Greek texts that the Lord has given to us. So when we speak of these additional two words, of "inerrancy" and "infallibility," along with inspiration, we have in mind, of course, the original Scriptures that God has given to us.

So the next word is the word “inerrancy,” which means that there are no errors in the Bible. Notice how Paul demonstrates this in Galatians 3:16, where he builds his whole doctrinal point on the fact that an Old Testament word was given in the singular form rather than in the plural. He says, “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds,” that’s plural, “as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ.” So inerrancy extends to every detail; there are no errors whatsoever. Not in the tense of a verb, not in whether a word is singular or plural, or anything else.

Our last word is the word “infallibility,” which means that the Bible is reliable, it is sure; it is unchangeable; it is never wrong. The Scriptures cannot fail. And this must be so, because God is the Author, and God is Truth itself. His veracity is one of His attributes. So He is incapable of inspiring falsehood or speaking anything that is untrustworthy. So the Bible is both inerrant and infallible.

But we must also consider the role of the human authors that God employed in writing the Holy Scriptures, the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament prophets and apostles. In 2 Peter 1:19–21 we read this, “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 spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” So let’s think about that a little. We see that “holy men” spoke, and that’s a reference to those prophets and apostles who were set apart by God. That’s what’s meant by “holy men,” men that were set apart by God for this purpose. So this is speaking to man’s agency, man’s involvement. Men, with their full personality, mind, heart, imagination, and will, were the agents or instruments that God employed. That is why each writer’s personal characteristics are reflected in the text. So when you read, for example, the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, both of which were written by Luke, there’s a certain character—the vocabulary that he uses, the sentence structure that he follows, and so on—and it’s obviously different from the Apostle John, who wrote the Gospel of John, and who wrote three Epistles and the book of Revelation. Or the Apostle Paul, he has a very distinctive style in the way that he writes, laying out arguments, and so on. And so each of these writers—and the same is true for the Old Testament prophets—had their own personal characteristics, and that’s reflected—we can see it in our Bibles.

But looking at 2 Peter 1, it also says that they spoke “as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” So this speaks to the divine origin of their words. God is the ultimate source of the special revelation that they’re writing. The Holy Spirit so fully influenced the writings of the apostles that, in whole and in every detail, the Scriptures are God’s perfectly accurate, infallible Word. You might also look up in your Bibles 1 Corinthians 2:13 and 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

So if you put these things together, we see that men were 100% engaged in writing, and God 100% superintended the production of those writings, guiding the human authors so that their words would be nothing but the words of God. Now that is not to say that God mechanically dictated his message to human authors. That is not true, because it would be a denial of the human author’s agency. The Bible does not teach that God so overruled the mental activity of the human authors that they were rendered passive, if you will. Rather, the Bible says that the Holy Spirit communicated through the writers the very words of God Himself. So the origin of all that is written comes from the mind of God, which is communicated by the Holy Spirit in superintending the writings of these human authors, so that what we have in our Bibles are the very words of God Himself. So that’s a summary of the doctrine of inspiration.

Thirdly, we need to consider this doctrine polemically. As we noted in the introduction of this lecture, Satan constantly seeks to attack the doctrine of Scripture in every generation through a

wide number of subtle ways. So we must consider and answer some of the primary arguments, noting specifically in this lecture those attacks against the doctrine of inspiration. This will ensure that we are equipped to refute these errors and to hold fast to the truth of Scripture.

We will first survey the modern attacks, and then summarize their common errors. So the first group would be those that we call the theological liberals, so theological liberalism. In some cases, the theological liberals would say flat out that the Bible is not the Word of God. Some of them would be a little more nuanced, and they would say that the Bible contains the Word of God, but along with many other errors. So notice that word “contains.” The Bible “contains” the Word of God, but along with many errors. So when it comes to the history that’s given, well, that may be inaccurate, they say; the science that is reflected in the text, well, that may be inaccurate; or there may be grammatical inaccuracies, and so on. What’s happening here? Well, this false teaching is basically saying that Scripture is the product of men, but a book that God uses, and He may use it for, you know, encouraging people or for their moral improvement or something else. They don’t say that the Bible is the Word of God—it contains the word of God. You might even think of a husk with the kernel in the middle. They would say that the Bible that you have in your hands is the husk, and that the Word of God is the kernel inside. And so there might be something little here, and something little there, when you’re reading through your Bibles, that are true, that come from God. So that’s the first set of errors.

The second set is the neo-orthodox view. This would be reflected in writers in the 20th century like the theologian Karl Barth and others: the neoorthodox view. And they teach that the Bible becomes the Word of God. So the Scripture is the instrument that God uses to existentially communicate this word, though the Bible itself is a fallible human record. And so the emphasis is that it is personal, not propositional, not verbal, not the words, but it is a personal experience. So the emphasis is on experience when you’re reading. That would work its way out, for example, by telling people that, Well, you’re reading your Bible, and as you’re reading along, all of a sudden something jumps out from the passage, and it is especially meaningful to you, and it affects you and impacts you, and so on. Well, there is the Word of God. So the Bible itself and the words that you find on the page aren’t the Word of God, but it is the means that God uses to somehow bring this experience home to your hearts. Similarly, some would contend that God speaks through the words, but not in the words. So it’s a similar problem. You can see that readily.

Another related view is that the intent is inspired, and the purpose is infallible, though the content or words are not inspired. So this error emphasizes that the Bible is fully human and thus errant in matters pertaining, again, to science and history, and so on.

So those are some of the common views, some of the common errors or attacks against the biblical doctrine of inspiration. And we can summarize some of the root problems that they all share. All of them stem from unbiblical notions about the roles of God and man in inspiration. And if you think about what we’ve described, they conclude, in essence, that man replaces God. God is responding to man perhaps and using his efforts, but God is not the source or origin of His own Word. God is replaced by man, and we end up with what they would consider a merely human book. Behind all of these errors also lies an anti-supernaturalism. So you think in terms of what is natural—you understand that; supernatural—they’re against what is supernatural; they want to keep everything earthy and human and man-centered. And so the same group of people—the theological liberals, who would reject the virgin birth, and would reject miracles that the Lord Jesus Christ did in His earthly ministry, those who would reject as well the idea of an eternal heaven and hell, and of the existence of angels, and all sorts of other things, also reject the hand of God in

giving to us an inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word. And so there's an anti-supernaturalism that lies behind this.

These falsehoods also deny that revelation is propositional. You'll note how they don't want to say that the words are inspired, that the letters are inspired. They want to get away from what is propositional revelation. And so that's why we began where we did. It's helpful to go back and think in terms of plenary—it extends to all of the parts; verbal—dealing with the very words that we find in our Bible. That's what gives us the boundaries for understanding inspiration. So really, the fundamental question is, does the final authority rest in God or man? Because rejecting God as the Author of Scripture means rejecting the divine authority of God's Word. And this too demonstrates part of the problem with these errors, these falsehoods. Behind them is a desire to be able to break loose from the authority of God that is exercised in His Word over men. In contrast to all these errors, the biblical orthodox view can be summarized this way: the Bible is the Word of God. Not that it contains the Word of God, or becomes the Word of God, the Bible is the Word of God. The Bible is propositional revelation, provided by the Holy Spirit, through the means of human authors. And so for the believer, we say: What the Bible says, God says. What the Bible says, God says. Or, in the words of the Westminster Larger Catechism, answer 4, "The holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience."

Fourthly, we need to consider this doctrine practically. Considering the doctrine of inspiration, we can now highlight some of the practical implications for ourselves, as we saw in 2 Timothy 3:16–17. Let's consider a few. First of all, the authority of the Bible is a fundamental article of the faith. So we must not allow any toleration for undermining that authority. Why? Because without the Scriptures, you and others can have no knowledge of God in Christ, and would be without hope, and "without God in the world," as Paul says in Ephesians 2:12. We must worship God as He is revealed in the Bible alone. We must cultivate believing confidence that we can read the infallible Word of God, and that it could be the "power of God" for salvation to us and others, as we see in Romans 1:16.

Secondly, love for God means that we should love our Bibles, since it is the very Word of God, and the means of hearing God's voice and knowing God's mind and will. David says in Psalm 119:97, "Oh, how I love thy law. It is my meditation all the day." We think about what we love. We need to read the Bible deeply and fully, meditating upon it, thinking long and hard about it. We should memorize it, and in memorizing it we need to give special care to accuracy with every inspired word. Psalm 119:11 says, "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee."

Thirdly, the believer must rely on the inspired Scriptures for growing in spiritual maturity. Matthew 4:4 says, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." The Spirit who inspired the Bible uses the Bible as the means for the believer increasing in gospel holiness, as Jesus says in John 17:17, "Sanctify them through thy truth: Thy word is truth."

Fourthly and lastly, in 2 Timothy 4:2, God calls ministers of the gospel, pastors, to "preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine." So ministers are to preach God's Word, not their own ideas or those of other men. Expounding the text of Scripture itself is necessary, pointing men back to God's inspired Word. Two chapters earlier in 2 Timothy 2:15 we read, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." It is a sober thing for fallible men to preach the infallible Word of God. If you're a pastor, you need to humbly plead for the



Spirit's help in preparing and preaching the Word. Pray that you would be an instrument of Christ, who is the true Minister of the Word, through the Spirit, who is the true author of the Word.

Well, in conclusion, in this lecture we have considered the plenary verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. This lays the foundation for the divine authority of the inerrant and infallible Word of God. In the next lecture, we will consider some further characteristics of the Holy Scriptures which flow from its divine inspiration. As you can see, understanding the doctrine of Scripture provides indispensable first principles for the study of systematic theology, because the Bible serves as the primary source for our whole study of theology.