

What is Revelation? (cont.) & The Doctrine of Scripture

Together we have been talking about the organism of revelation. We have looked at general revelation, under the categories of creational revelation, revelation through providence, and revelation through conscience. Then we segued to particular revelation and again I want to draw your attention to the distinctions between particular and general revelation. General revelation is universal; it holds at all times, in all places. Particular revelation, however, is historical revelation; it is God speaking, acting, in context with particular persons. When we ended the last lecture we were looking at the Word and Spirit.

The primacy of the Holy Spirit. John Calvin held that neither a church, nor reason, nor a philosophical school, nor tradition, nor the subjective self, can qualify as an authority which establishes the Bible as God's Word. The belief that Scripture is the Word of God is not the result of a papal announcement, nor a conclusion inferred from rational principles. Rather it is a belief which the Holy Spirit produces within the people of God. This primacy of the Spirit over any physical authority fits beautifully with Scripture's own witness concerning the ministry of the Spirit in John 14-16. First, the Holy Spirit witnesses to Christ and Christ comes to us only in Scripture. Second, the same Spirit who impresses Jesus upon us also guides the people of God into all truth. And third, the Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. But this emphasis upon the internal working of the Holy Spirit does raise questions about the Reformation view of authority. So I am going to look at two questions here.

First, does this reliance on the authenticating work of the Spirit regarding revelation render all rational or evidential claims invalid? In other words, are we working simply by the Spirit and everything else needs to be ignored or tossed out? The answer is 'no,' by no means. The Westminster Confession, chapter 1, article 5, claims, "We are completely persuaded and assured of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Bible only by the inward working of the Holy Spirit, who testified by and with the word in our hearts." But immediately preceding that, the Confession cites some of what we might call the objective perfections of Scripture—its coherence, its magnificence of style, its antiquity, and so forth—and claims that the Bible itself shows that it is the Word of God. Calvin said the same thing eighty years before. But such facts as the historical accuracy of the text, fulfilled prophecy, and all the rest, are not proofs so much as they are confirmatory arguments. They are, if you will, an apologetic for the people of God, for they tell us we are within our intellectual rights to believe, even if our believing is not the result of an intellectual process. Another way of saying this is that faith seeks understanding—right back to that formula from Anselm. We do not believe because something is absurd; we do not believe against all argument, against all reason. But we do believe firstly because of God's effectual working through His Spirit. I can probably state it this way: God does give His people reasons to believe, but the cause of our belief is the Spirit of God.

The second question is: if the Spirit brings home the Word of God to the people of God, if He teaches the body of Christ and leads that body into all truth, does this merely put us back into the hands of subjectivism and individual experience dressed up under the name of the internal working of the Spirit? That is the Roman Catholic argument regarding John Calvin and the Reformed tradition, and some folks in the broad Reformed or Protestant tradition do seem to represent such a view. Bernard Ram for instance, who actually was a Baptist theologian, spoke of the pattern of authority as: the objective word written in Scripture, together with what he called the subjective word, the inner illumination and conviction of the Spirit within the heart of the believer. I think that is insufficient, however, because it does not do full justice to the Reformation doctrine of the Word and Spirit. Calvin did not view the Spirit of God as working individual insight in individual believers, but rather as working through the body of Christ. The Reformation goal was not each man alone with his Bible with only the internal

working of the Spirit to help him. The Reformers—Luther, Zwingli, Calvin on down—opposed the individual anarchy of the Anabaptists as surely as they opposed the ecclesiastical monarchy of Rome. Geneva is a good example of what Calvin had in mind. All the preachers in the city would preach on the same text each week. And for the week preceding the sermon, there would be Bible study groups, which talked about the sermon, discussed the text, and that pattern would later be codified in the Reformed tradition as the teaching elders in the church. The Spirit of God illumines the entire body, not just the individual person, and He illumines the body of Christ throughout history. This present community, the present community of faith, is nothing more than the current installment of the historic church. We sometimes think of history as being something other than us, but history *is* us. We are the present installment of that history.

Relationships within a three-fold word. We have actually talked about revelation in a number of forms, but it really boils down to three. One is general revelation—that universal revelation that is true at all times and all places, and is given through creation, providence and conscience. A second is particular revelation, which we tend to associate, and rightly so, with Scripture. God has a general revelation and then a particular, special, inscripturated revelation. The third is Jesus. I want to give Him a pride of place here. After all, He is the Word of God in the flesh.

So we have been talking about the Word of God in three manifestations: general, particular, and Jesus Christ, who Himself is particular revelation. But I am going to draw Him out and give Him pride of place. Yes, any discussion about revelation, about the Word of God, which tends to stand within the classical, orthodox tradition, must begin with the Bible, Scripture. It must begin with the confession that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God. In the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 1, article 6: “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.” Beginning with that confession, that the Bible is the Word of God, we must then allow the Bible to instruct us about revelation. It is a word of faith and salvation through which alone we are brought to the Word of God our Savior. Again, we believe the Bible, yet we do not believe in the Bible. Only Christ is the Redeemer. But without Scripture, Jesus will always remain unknown to us.

That was true just as much for the first-century people who met Jesus as it is for us. It was only as John, Matthew, the rest of the disciples, and everyone else had their hearts and minds opened by the Word of God to the truth, that they knew Jesus of Nazareth—the Word of God who became man. It was only as these people, even though they saw Jesus in the flesh, understood the Old Testament expectation that they were able to recognize who they were dealing with (cf., Luke 16:29-31, Luke 24:25-27, John 5:46-47). We can say the same thing about creation. It is only as our hearts and minds are opened up by the faithful, Spirit-directed Scripture that we will appreciate this world as God’s creation. Though the Word of God is plainly seen in the ordering of creation (Romans 1), without the written word of Scripture and the ministry of the Spirit, we will go on repressing the truth. Just as Christ only comes to us dressed in the robes of Scripture, so we come to know the world as God’s creation only through the spectacles of God’s written Word. While God’s revelation in creation certainly precedes His revelation in Scripture historically, the latter, Scripture, is the eventual point of entry for us concerning revelation.

This indispensable role of Scripture was what the Reformers were so eager to protect, and here we enter into the question of *sola scriptura*, by Scripture alone. This phrase, *sola scriptura*, has sometimes been misunderstood. It does not involve any suggestion that revelation comes to us only in the Bible. It does not say that only the Word coming to us from Scripture, the redemptive word, is revelation. It does say,

however, that only the Word coming to us from Scripture can open us up to the fullness of God's revelation in our lives. Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers held that God reveals His ways and His will not only in Scripture but also in general revelation. *Sola scriptura* was simply a commitment that we must begin with Scripture. It was a commitment that the one unimpeachable standard by which our faith is to be evaluated is Scripture. It was a commitment that we do not begin with human reason, scientific testing, religious phenomena, or anything else; our starting point is Scripture. That is what the formula, *sola scriptura*, means. It is not the only norm, but it is the norm of norms. It is the norm that tests all else. All things must be evaluated by the Bible.

In light of the Reformation's starting point, this high position of *sola scriptura*, the church has come to speak of the marks, or perfections, of Scripture, usually under four categories, namely: its necessity, sufficiency, perspicuity, and authority. I am going to just very quickly say something about these and I am going to return to them later this evening. First of all, over against the Roman Catholic Church's emphasis upon the necessity of the church as the dispenser of salvation, the Reformation proclaimed the fundamental necessity of Scripture in illuminating the way of life. That is what is meant by the necessity of Scripture. Second, the Word in Scripture is fully sufficient for a knowledge of salvation. The light of tradition is not a necessary element in our coming to know God and His redemption. All tradition must be tested by Scripture, that is the meaning of sufficiency. Third, whereas Rome made the clarity, or perspicuity, of Scripture pendant on the teaching of the church and the magisterium, the Reformation held that under the leading of the Spirit, the redemptive message of Scripture is unmistakably clear to the body of Christ. The fourth category is authority. Given that Scripture is necessary for salvation, and that it is sufficient and perspicuous in its redemptive revelation, it is also fully authoritative. We are to submit humbly and obediently to its redemptive message.

While the Bible enjoys a corrective function for our seeing of general revelation, we must say that both general revelation and particular scriptural revelation are truthful and even authoritative. It is not that general revelation needs to be corrected, but our interpretation of that revelation certainly does. General revelation and particular revelation inform one another. By saying that, I do not mean to devalue Scripture in the slightest. Giving general revelation its proper due is actually an elevation and protection of Scripture because it conforms to the Bible's own witness concerning God's Word in creation, providence, and conscience. Given our fallen natures, we cannot understand creation's revelatory word apart from Scripture. So due to the fall, in our blindness—if you remember Calvin's imagery—Scripture enjoys a preeminence; it is those spectacles that we wear, yet we must also recognize that Scripture does not come to us in a revelational vacuum. As Scripture is indispensable for a proper understanding of creation, God's Word in creation and providence, and all the rest, so Scripture itself cannot be understood apart from its creational context. Yes, the Bible has a creational context. The Bible does not give us an alternative context to creation. There is continuity between Scripture and creation, between Scripture and God's more general means of revelation.

In Scripture, as in all of revelation, God makes His ways and His will known through creaturely means. Recall the discussion of accommodation—God's condescension to us. In the case of Scripture, God reveals His will, His redemptive Word, through creaturely language. Thus we understand Scripture only in the context of our daily experience of creation. We relate to the Bible in the context of our prior experience in creation; we cannot do otherwise. Scripture communicates through the words and historical and culturally-shaped images that are intelligible only in their reference to the created order. When we read in Scripture of male and female, camels and horses, swords and spears, slaves and princes, we know what those things mean, not because they are given a self-contained meaning on the pages of Scripture, but because they relate to the phenomenal world around us that is bounded by God's creational law. Our understanding and appreciation of God's creational revelation does inform our

reading of Scripture and it cannot help but do that. Now by giving general revelation its due, I am not devaluing Scripture. What I am actually arguing is that Scripture and general revelation do not and cannot stand in opposition to one another. Both are true and both have an authority.

Now one area in which this is particularly pressing today, as it has been for some time, is the so-called debate between science and faith. Please note here, I am not at all suggesting that science is as authoritative as Scripture. Science is not the same thing as creational revelation. What is science? Science is an interpretation of creation. It is not the same thing as creation. And we must recognize that as secularist science refuses to acknowledge the fundamental dependence of the universe upon its Creator, secular science is wrong-headed from the get-go. But that does not mean that all science is misguided, or that scientific inquiry is somehow opposed to faith in scriptural revelation. The Christian community has traditionally responded negatively to certain trends in secularist science, and often with very good reason. But we need to be careful here; we must not throw out the creational baby with the secularist bathwater. Rather than simply saying that Scripture teaches $A=B$, and that, if science teaches $A=C$, then the Bible is right and science is wrong, we must realize that wherever we have a conflict, what we are actually witnessing is the clash of interpretation, an interpretation of Scripture on one side and interpretation of creation on the other side. Now if a believing interpretation of Scripture does say $A=B$, and a responsible scientific interpretation of creation says $A=C$, in such a way that $C \neq B$, then obviously there is an error in interpretation taking place. The error may be our interpretation of the created order, but it may also be our interpretation of Scripture. Our experience of creation does revise our interpretation of the Bible. One example is a famous one. Early in the seventeenth century, the Roman Catholic hierarchy judged Galileo's heliocentric theory of the solar system to be heretical. The heliocentric theory was that the sun is the center of the solar system. They judged it heretical because it clearly contradicted the geocentric worldview that was held by the medieval church, and which they thought was taught in such texts as Joshua 10:12-13. In that conflict the scientific interpretation of creation was right, and the medieval church's interpretation of Scripture was wrong. And today none of us questions the fact that the earth revolves around the sun, rather than the sun revolving around the earth.

Do not misunderstand; I am not trying to make room for an evolutionary interpretation of the emergence of life or any such thing. It is not my concern; I am not an evolutionist. What is at stake here is integrity of revelation, both scriptural and creational. Let me state it this way: if the Bible is true, it must describe reality as it really is. If it does not describe reality as it really is, then the Bible simply is not true; it is a collection of myths. We believe the Bible does describe reality as it really is, or at least it gives us the materials such that we can see the world as it truly is. If God is the Creator, there is no conflict between a proper interpretation of creation and a proper interpretation of Scripture. In other words, creation and Scripture hang together. It is interesting that in the Apostle's Creed—the first two articles go together. "I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. And I believe in Jesus Christ, His Son." Every word which proceeds from the mouth of God is true. I want to turn here to the issue of Scripture in more detail.

Speaking of particular revelation as being mediated by time and space, how then do we guard it from being completely bound to time and space, so that it is purely relative? Let me suggest that there are many truths which come to us, including most of the truths that we really hold dear, which we really see as important, dressed in history. That does not relativize them for us. You know there is an old saying: "Everyone who was alive in November of 1963 knows where they were on the twenty-second day of that month." There is no way to go back; you cannot undo it. It is true from then on to forever. Furthermore, it has changed our lives, and such events happen repeatedly. I think there is often a sense that somehow historical reality is negligible in some way, that it is optional in some way. But it is not

optional. All the truths that we hold precious are historical. I have a three-and-a-half year old son. I cannot go back to before he was born; I cannot imagine that happening and it is true for my life, my reality, forever.

Let me give you a hint here of where we are going with this. God demonstrates Himself and wants to demonstrate Himself and reveal Himself in Scripture in utterly personal, historical, particular terms. That does not relativize Him at all; rather it is the only way to know a person. I have been thinking about this very issue in dealing with gender issues, among others. If we could somehow subtract God's personhood from Him, do you know what we would have left? Nothing. Every significant truth would fall. We will talk about this when we get to attributes, but sometimes we list God's personhood as one of His attributes. We must not do that. Instead, you start there, because those attributes are His attributes, the attributes of His person, the attributes of who He is. His personhood is not negotiable in any way; it is not optional. And persons can only be known in the midst of following them around, in the midst of experiencing their lives as they disclose themselves to us.

Let us now take up the issue of the doctrine of Scripture. It is a widely held opinion among theologians that John Calvin was the monster of the sixteenth century. By monster, I do not mean something bad; I mean something good. He was the greatest mind of that century. When I was a student at Harvard, my mentor was Richard R. Niebuhr, who said there was one man in the history of the Christian church with whom you do not want to get into a theological argument because you will lose it. And that man was John Calvin. He was quite simply a person without peer, an exegete with amazing abilities, and the output of this man who only lived to be fifty-six far outstripped anyone else during this period. Yes, I know I have been gushing about Calvin. But, it is okay; I teach in a Reformed seminary; I am allowed at some point to do that.

Calvin was, however, a pale shadow of Martin Luther in at least one respect: we might call it 'the sound bite.' Luther had an amazing ability to sum things up in a word, in a phrase. It seems like Calvin did all the hard work or the heavy thinking for the Reformation—not all of it, but a good chunk of it—but Luther seemed to put so many thoughts into a nutshell. For example, after admitting in a pulpit debate that he thought it possible for the pope to err, and for a church council to be wrong, Luther was summoned before the Diet of Worms to face very serious charges of heresy. When he got there, he was called to recant his views, and he stood before the diet and said this, "Unless I am convinced by sacred Scripture or evident reason I will not recant. My conscience is held captive by the Word of God, and to act against conscience is neither right nor safe." What has the power to so bind the conscience? What has the authority to commend belief and actions? Luther's answer is: only the Bible. The Bible alone has that authority, has that power—the written Word of God.

And with that, the Reformation became a movement typified by the slogan, *sola scriptura*. Now the principle of *sola scriptura* was used by the Reformers against the Roman Catholic Church and its commitment that the authority of Scripture stands under the authority of the church and the church's tradition. The Medieval church affirmed the Bible as the Word of God, but it also said the ecclesiastical tradition is revelatory, and the church's tradition is the authoritative interpreter of Scripture. By the use of the *sola scriptura* formula, the Reformers did intentionally mean to deny any revelational status to tradition, but they did not intend to reject any and every authority outside of Scripture. The authority of the church and tradition were not rejected, but they were subjected to the authority of Scripture. They were relativized in reference to Scripture, and as proof of this both Luther and Calvin affirmed the Apostle's Creed and both of them started writing catechisms and confessions. During the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth century, almost two dozen Lutheran and Reformed confessional documents were produced. Clearly the lines of religious authority were not limited to Scripture alone,

but whatever authorities might exist must be brought under the rule of Scripture and must be tested by this one unimpeachable norm.

So Scripture is preeminent in the reformational mind. It alone bears the authority of God. Only Scripture carries the authority of “thus sayeth the Lord.” No creed, confession, church, pastor, philosophical perspective, or theological school can make such a claim. It is crucial that we understand the centrality of *sola scriptura* because the real problem of any confessional tradition, and I believe that there is no such thing as a non-confessional tradition, is the risk of confusing confessional authority with biblical authority. Let me just say this, the creed and the confession may be superb summaries of the Gospel. They may give us clear insight into the foundations of our faith and give us good direction as to how to walk in the world, but they are human creations. Thus the Westminster tradition itself held that all those authorities are liable to error. Creed, confession, catechism may be inspiring, and I believe they are, but they are not inspired. Coming under the rule of *sola scriptura*, they must be judged and interpreted by Scripture.

Let us define inspiration. If the Bible is that central, if it is the judge of all, if it is the one unimpeachable norm, then it is necessary that we understand the nature of its authority. It has been common throughout the history of the church to refer to the Bible as an inspired book. The classic text here is 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped in every good work.” Now, Paul uses the word *theopneustos* here—meaning, ‘God-breathed.’ In English Bibles we have often translated *theopneustos* as ‘inspired,’ but our English word ‘expired’ would better capture the idea of *theopneustos*. For Paul was not saying the Bible was inspired in the sense that God breathed His imprimatur into the text after the fact, but rather the Scripture is inspired in that it comes from God who is its very speaker, its author. So I think it is a better image and it makes better sense of the text to think of the Bible, the Word of God, as ‘expired,’ breathed out from God. Do not think of God coming up and saying, “Oh, the Gospel of John, that looks pretty good, I think I will inspire it.” That is not the kind of vision we ought to have because when we talk about inspiration, we are talking about nothing less than the authority of Scripture. As the inspired Word of God, it is the authoritative Word of God; it is that which proclaims “thus sayeth the Lord.”

Inspiration has usually been thought of as a process by which God moved the human authors to write a word, which was also His Word. Thus Moses and John were agents of revelation through the process of inspiration. And the Westminster Confession is representative of this idea when it says, “Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments, all which are given by inspiration by God to be the rule of faith and life.” Now this use of the word inspiration as referring to the manner of production conforms to Paul’s use in 2 Timothy 3:16, and it also captures Peter’s thought in 2 Peter 1:21, “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.”

Over the years, however, there has been a lot of debate. What is the mechanism by which this inspiration takes place? How does the Holy Spirit move men to write the very words of God? Is inspiration verbal? Is it dictatorial? Is it mechanical? The fact of the matter is, the Bible does not tell us; it does not tell us the mechanism. And in my view much of the discussion has lost sight of the point, which is the character of Scripture as an authoritative word. The point is not so much the method of Scripture’s generation, but its authority. In an article by Sinclair Ferguson called, “How Does the Bible Look at Itself?” he suggests that the theological issue is not the process of writing, but rather the source and character of what is written. While using the realities of creation in history, God is the source of revelation. The Bible is, if I can put it this way, an extension of God’s own character. Therefore it is

fully authoritative and it requires no external structures, be they reason, experience, a person, or the church, to license it. The authority of Scripture is the authority of God Himself.

That is a good argument, and it certainly comports well with 2 Timothy 3:16's affirmation of the fact of inspiration. Yet, I need to admit here that traditionally the church has usually meant something closer to a mode of production when it has spoken of inspiration. The Westminster Confession of Faith says, "Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments, all which are given by inspiration, the inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life." So we see the Westminster tradition is affirming inspiration as a method or means of production. A second example is the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church, from a statement it made in 1959: "Inspiration is that mighty act of God whereby He spoke His words in the words of man and made them effective and a final." A third is Archibald Alexander from 1836, he said, "The true definition of inspiration then is such a divine influence upon the minds of the sacred writers as rendered them exempt from error both in regard to the ideas and the words." And B.B. Warfield wrote in 1878, in his book, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, "Inspiration is that extraordinary, supernatural influence exerted by the Holy Ghost on the writers of our sacred books by which their words were rendered also the word of God and therefore perfectly infallible." And finally from G.I. Packer's book, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, in 1958, he said, "Inspiration is to be defined as a supernatural providential influence of God's Holy Spirit upon the human authors which caused them to write what He wished to be written for the communication of revealed truths to others." Whether one keys upon the process, as these citations have, or the product, all of these sources would agree with Dr. Ferguson that the point of inspiration is, first of all, that God is the source of biblical revelation and, second, that the character of that revelation is an extension of God's own character. It is fully authoritative.

Let us move on to the extent of inspiration. Even before the Reformation period, the church commonly spoke of the Bible as not merely inspired, but as plenary inspired. They spoke of the plenary inspiration of Scripture, and by that they meant that all of Scripture is inspired, not merely part of it, not merely some books within it; inspiration, the authority of the text, extends to all its parts.

After the beginning of the Reformation, a stronger view was developed, however, along with compelling reasons in support of it. After all, what has the Reformation done? It has said that the higher authority is not the church; it is the Word of God. Thus a very clear statement is needed of the nature of its authority, and they moved to a strengthening of their statement. Beginning about the 1580s, they began to speak of a verbal inspiration. Verbal inspiration claims that the influence of the Spirit extends not merely to the ideas of the human writers, but to the very words of Scripture as well. The resulting product is such that it is comprised of the very words God intends His people to hear. Thus the Bible is the verbal—the very words God wants to speak—and plenary—its authority extends to the entirety of Scripture—Word of God. We should note here that this view of inspiration has had its detractors. Many people in the history of the church and many people present today have found something to complain about regarding verbal inspiration. Without getting into particulars, their objections are that when the verbal inspiration of the texts is held, when we hold that the Bible is the verbal plenary Word of God, it makes disagreeing with the Bible difficult. If I hold that the Bible has the authority of God Himself, then my saying, "Well, the Bible is wrong here, there, or another place," becomes a problematic issue.

I do not like slippery slope arguments, so I will try not to use one. It does seem to me, however, that a particularly high view of Scripture is located right here with the conception of verbal inspiration. This may, in fact, be a slippery slope argument, but what we see in modernity, with its rejection of the inspiration and authority of Scripture, are views which not only do not comport with the Bible's own view of itself, but do not comport with the historic church's view. When we accept the verbal inspiration

of the Bible, I believe we are accepting the Bible's view of itself, as Ferguson argues in the piece to which I alluded. And when we accept the Bible as authoritative, as verbally inspired, there are a number of other affirmations which appear to be the natural concomitants, or products, of that conception.

I have already said something about the marks of Scripture, or the perfections of Scripture and I want to return to those here. First, the necessity of Scripture. As I have already indicated, the Bible is necessary for redemption. Yet, we need to be careful with that statement. It is quite possible that people have been redeemed without the mediation of Scripture. What we really mean by the necessity of Scripture is the necessity of the Gospel, and that Gospel comes to us from Scripture. Certainly there are people who have been witnessed to and have accepted and have been regenerated without the direct mediation of Scripture. But as Jesus comes to us only dressed in the robes of Scripture, our knowledge of the Gospel is only known through Scripture, so the Bible is necessary as it mediates the Gospel.

A second mark of Scripture is infallibility. We see here two different definitions. The first, from the Oxford dictionary, emphasizes the Bible's truthfulness, defining infallible as "not liable to be deceived or mistaken; incapable of erring." This definition is fairly close to what most Presbyterians would affirm. The second definition, however, is closer in emphasis to faithfulness. Infallibility means that Scripture's diverse illocutionary forces will invariably achieve their respective purposes. Illocutionary forces means forms of discourse. Within the Dutch tradition that I come from originally, there are many folks who do not like the term inerrancy, who do not like thinking in those terms and would rather think in terms of faithfulness. I list both of these here simply so that you realize there is no one absolute privileged definition of some of these terms. There is some freedom here, even within Reformed, Presbyterian, evangelical circles.

Next, inerrancy. Again, the Oxford dictionary defines inerrancy as, "exempt from error, free from mistakes, infallible." Notice what the Oxford dictionary has done. Under infallible, it says, "See inerrancy," and under inerrancy, it says, "See infallible." So probably from this point on, until we get to inerrancy, we will be traveling in circles, and coming back to the same issue in getting at the truthfulness of Scripture. But let us briefly discuss sufficiency and perspicuity before we pick up the issue of inerrancy.

The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture indicates that the Old and New Testaments, as the divinely inspired Word of God, contain everything necessary for the purpose for which they were written: to lead us to Christ, and to guide us in our response to Him. In short, the Bible is a complete and infallible revelation of that knowledge of God and His will which is necessary for salvation and for a holy, obedient walk. Once again the text which bears most directly on this is 2 Timothy 3:15-17. Also relevant are the texts which speak to the purpose of Scripture, such as John 20:30-31 and Romans 15:4. These texts imply a two-fold sufficiency: first, the knowledge of God and His saving Word; and second, a directional knowledge of God's will for our lives. We should note, however, there are some things the sufficiency of Scripture does *not* mean. Sufficiency does not mean that we can do without everything else. It does not mean that we can do without the empirical sciences or the phenomenal world about us as we seek to live lives that are glorifying to God. The farmer is obliged by Scripture to learn from creation the principles of good farming, but those principles are not listed in the Bible. Part of our moral obedience is to take care of our bodies, but not all that is useful for knowledge of healthcare is found within the pages of Scripture. There is no list of poisons, nor does the Bible give us precise, scientific definitions for such important events as conception or childbirth. Sufficiency also does not mean that everything a person may need to know, even know theologically, is found explicitly in a biblical text. For instance, we will have to do some sympathetic thinking in connection to the doctrine of God and the trinity. You cannot cite just one biblical proof text for the trinity.

To protect the church from the ministrations of a priestly class, the confessions of the Reformation period spoke of the ‘perspicuity’ of Scripture, as in the Westminster Confession, chapter one, paragraphs seven through nine. “That revelation, which is necessary for salvation, is available in Scripture, by due use of ordinary means, and as such it is available to all.” The doctrine of perspicuity, however, does not mean that the Bible is so clear that anyone can immediately understand everything within it. There is much in the Bible that will require intense study and expertise of diverse fields, sometimes fairly special fields: geography, geology, and history, among others. Perspicuity does mean, however, that as to its central message—Jesus Christ died for sinners, Jesus Christ is the Lord, Jesus Christ is the Savior—the Bible is plain, so plain that not even the *New World Translation* can corrupt it.

I should say something about ‘finality’ as well. The traditional Protestant view here is called ‘cessationism,’ which claims that the gift of prophecy became redundant with the completion of the biblical texts, the biblical canon. As the purpose of Old Testament prophecy was to proclaim the promise of redemption, the purpose of New Testament prophecy is to proclaim the fulfillment of redemption in Jesus Christ, including all that is necessary for us to know in this interim age about the future consummation. Once that proclamation is complete, the gift of prophetism, in the sense of being a mediator of revelation, is now obsolete in the history of redemption. In other words, we have a completed Scripture. Some texts that relate to the issue are: 1 Corinthians 13:8-10, which says that which is perfect has come; and Hebrews 2:3-4, which intimates that prophecy and other special gifts existed for the purpose of authenticating the apostolic witness.

Throughout the history of the church, there has also been a tradition of ‘continualism’ in two varying degrees, though I do not want to press this too far. Some folks have actually gone as far as Thomas Munzer during the Reformation. Munzer said, “The Bible is about a bunch of stuff that happened a long time ago to no one I ever met. Therefore, it is irrelevant to me, where I live.” What Munzer wanted was new prophesies. He was saying ‘yes’ to the Spirit but ‘no’ to the Bible. That is a kind of radical position in continualism that new revelations of the Spirit will arise which will render the old ones, even the New Testament, obsolete. A much more orthodox notion, which may not even technically be continualism, is that the Bible is the final redemptive word of God, yet God still does speak to His people. Sometimes we want to take that reality and call it illumination, rather than revelation. I do not want to argue here about terms, but we need to realize that there is a broad spectrum in terms of continualism. When I hear people say, “The Lord revealed X to me.” I think, “Yeah, I can believe that.” What we see throughout the New Testament period is that God does in fact speak to people. I am not sure we need to think of that as having ceased. If the Lord places it upon your heart that you need to speak to another person, either about the Lord or about their behavior or whatever it is, it seems to me that is legitimate.