

#0226 - March 16, 2009

Why We Believe What We Believe – Inspiration Part 1

[Easley:] This is the Word of God. Cherish it! Study it. Learn. Pound your head against it! Read it. Read it. Read it; because herein is life and elsewhere is death.

[Lepine:] This in *inContext* with Michael Easley, I'm Bob Lepine. We're in a series called "Why We Believe What We Believe;" and Michael, we've already heard a message that you did on the subject of the Bible and why we can trust the Bible. But you did a second message on the whole issue of inspiration. Why did you feel like you needed to address this subject when you had already covered the authority of Scripture?

[Easley:] So many religions around the world, this is the issue: How we got this book, this piece of information we hold to. The Koran, of course, Mormons, of course. So to understand the unique Bible that we hold, we must understand how we got it and the concept of inspiration; that God, the capital "A" author, used man, the little "a" author to pen the Scriptures is very important to understand this transmission so that when I open this book there is style here that we certainly see uniquely to John or to Paul or to Peter, but it's still God's word.

So, I believe it's critical and in an apologetic context when we're talking about why we believe the Bible, this is an important piece of it. Well, how did you get the Bible? Isn't it just some old book people stuck together? No, there's some very good evidence and information about God's transmission of the Scripture to you and me.

[Lepine:] And you begin by referencing a book that many in our audience have probably never heard of, but everyone in your audience as you presented this message knew the book you were talking about. [laughter]

[Easley:] The book is called *Foundational Faith*. It is a compilation of essays by Moody professors. So this is the foundation of all these subjects and all of our students, of course, have to read the book while they're at Moody.

[Lepine:] Well, let's jump into your message. Here is Michael Easley with part one of a message on the inspiration of Scripture.

[Easley:] In a book that you've probably never heard of, *Foundational Faith* [laughter], David Finkbeiner begins, "Miller Jackson has defined authority as the right to command belief and/or action. Christians rightly recognize there is no higher authority than God. His right to command belief and action is unique, after all God is creator and therefore has the right of ownership over everything. His omnipotence gives Him the sovereign power to support His right of ownership and His unlimited power and wisdom render His judgments unquestionable. Indeed, all authority derives from Him. This is why discussions of Biblical authority are never far removed from the question of the Bible's divine status."

Excellent statement and question. We are in a series I've entitled "Why We Believe What We Believe." In this section I want us to think about why we believe what we believe about inspiration, about divine revelation. It is not important, it is crucial. To understand why you believe that this book is the Word of God and what all that entails is one of those foundation stones, one of those key issues that really you have no room to negotiate in.

Now, as I've been studying this whole topic in recent weeks it's been fascinating to go through and review inerrancy, divine inspiration, the transmission of the text, inerrancy, infallibility, all these issues that kind of swirl around when you talk about the Bible being the inspired Word of God.

At the same time, I've been intrigued how many new arguments there are that continue to challenge that we have the very Word of God. When I served in the pastorate, there was a church right across, a building, right across from us that began going up prior to 9/11 and as we watched the construction of this building, it was very unusual and then we realized it was a mosque. It was an Afghan mosque being built right across the street from us.

Two of the pastors on staff that I was serving with were pretty good in their knowledge of the Koran and of Islam beliefs and as they got established we invited their imam for lunch. They didn't want to come to our church, so we met in an Afghan restaurant and there were four of their leaders, the imam, and then four pastors like sitting across from each other at this table. There was no one else in this restaurant for two and a half hours and as we began chatting, the imam told a little bit of himself and I asked a lot of questions and discovered he'd memorized the entire Koran.

When he got up he would recite the Koran and two, what I would call, of his elders, were behind him if he made a mistake following along and they would correct him verbally. And as we talked at length, very quickly the issue became, "How did you get your Bible?" And for the bulk of our two hour and change lunch, we talked about inspiration, the authority of Scripture, the difference between the Koran and what we call our Old and New Testaments. They, of course, believe that God, Allah, gave Mohammad the revelation through the angel Gabriel. And the idea that you cannot translate the Koran into any language and still have the Koran is a fundamental tenant to most Muslims.

The notion that we've translated Hebrew and Greek and Aramaic into English and all kinds of different flavors of those English translations is completely foreign to their thinking because if you translate to Koran you've lost the meaning of the Koran. Not only that, but their whole view of inspiration and the way the text is transmitted into the Koran is what they literally will die for. And so this cordial, collegial, at times lively discussion centered around is this the Word of God or not?

Now, when I was in seminary and graduate school, I thought I believed the Bible, I trusted it, it was good enough. That old bumper sticker, "God said it, I believe it, that settles it." You know, that's kind of how simple I am and when I sat at that lunch I was thrilled that I had the experience to understand, "How did we get this Bible?"

What is this document that you and I hold and love and cherish and what does it mean to the world? If anyone challenges the Koran, you will have an interesting discussion, but you can challenge to Bible all day long.

The Bible is not a book like *War and Peace* or *To Kill a Mockingbird* or the *Grapes of Wrath*. The Bible's not composed by Ernest Hemmingways, Edith Whartons, James Joyces, Evelyn Waughs, William Faulkners, Daniel Steeles or Steven Kings. The Bible is comprised by men that God selected to pen, to scratch, to mark down words that you hold in your hand.

If we look at this from an historical lens we see that, we can almost say it was universally accepted by those that followed Jesus Christ that the Bible was inspired. Indeed, if you go back to Judaism, Genesis chapter one, "God said," "God said," "God said," "God spoke," and they believed it. After all, God is the agent. "In the beginning, God." And so as the divine agent who breaks through revelation and says things, Jews and believers in Christ pretty well said, "Well, Scripture said," "It is written," "God said," "God has said," and in the New Testament, "The Holy Spirit says." You say, "Oh, okay. That's the Bible. That's what we believe."

Before the Nineteenth Century, that was pretty well accepted among Christendom's big umbrella and then as things changed, you know higher criticism, some of you have studied the issues, this is when much of this comes under attack and the idea of dismantling the Word of God.

"Maybe it's just the concepts that are inspired."

"Well, some of it's inspired."

"Maybe none of it's inspired."

"Let's make it a deistic book not unlike an author just mentioned."

Justin Martyr said the Bible was the very language of God.

George of Nyssa in the Fourth Century said, "It is the voice of the Holy Spirit."

By the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries the Protestant Reformation in full force and by the second half of this process, the evolution ideas, the humanistic ideas and higher criticism ideas began to dismantle what we would call the historic doctrines of inspiration.

I won't detail all the other issues about what people say about the Bible, you can do those at your leisure and all you want, but I want to address a little bit with you now is the idea of why we believe what we believe about inspiration. It's not important to your faith, it is crucial; because if indeed this is God's message to man rooted from God to us in these forms we hold in our hand, it is the message of hope, it is the message of life, it is the message of truth, it is the message of salvation to which we ascribe and to which we hope to share with others.

I want to direct your attention to the Moody Doctrinal Statement Article Two. Article two reads, "The Bible, including both the Old and New Testaments, is a divine revelation. The original autographs of which were verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit." Then there are two references we're going to look at in some detail. Second Timothy 3:16 and Second Peter one verse twenty-one.

Before we do that, I want to read a footnote that was added in 1928 to our doctrinal statement. It says, "The Bible is without error in all that it affirms in the original autographs and the only authoritative guide for faith and practice and as such must not be supplanted by any other fields of human learning."

And whenever you're in the areas of doctrine and you start to add more words to explain something, you create more pieces of the puzzle. And each one of those words for you who are good students and studying these issues and wrestling with them, you know; every time you add another adjective you open another set of discussions on these terms.

So, before we go too far off, before I go off on this, I want to look at these two passages in some detail. So, if you have a Bible, open to Second Timothy chapter three and what I would simply call this verse is, "Scripture is the word from God." Scripture is the word from God in Second Timothy three and I actually want to pick up the reading in verse fifteen to set a context. Second Timothy chapter three, let's pick up the text in verse fifteen. Second Timothy three, verse fifteen:

and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Verse fifteen, I think, is important because the segue through the Holy Spirit, through Paul to Timothy, to you and me was the word, these Holy Scriptures, these sacred writings in verse fifteen, which do two things. They have the inspiration of God and they lead to wisdom so that a person can find salvation. Say it another way: The Bible, the Scriptures, give us enough information to know what we believe. That's what Paul is saying when he reminds Timothy of these sacred writings. Context is crucial. I've encouraged, I hope, many times, maybe you get tired of me encouraging you, good that's when you start learning. When you have a question about something, look at the context very carefully.

I've told you the story about caulking. When you paint a house or you do some work, you caulk to cover the cracks and blemishes. And my friend used to say, "Caulk covers a multitude of sins." [laughter]

I like to interpret that, "Context covers a multitude of interpretational sins." When people get off, you know, kilter in areas, go back first and look at the context in which it falls. And here we have a very important context. Paul said to Timothy, "You learned from childhood, from your mother and grandmother, the sacred writings which gave you the wisdom to come to salvation," and then that sets up verse sixteen, "all Scripture is inspired" and so on. Let's look at the verse in some detail.

"All Scripture" is important to note. There is some debate among scholars and theologians whether it's collective or distributive. In other words, is it all the Bible or we might say every Scripture? And believe it or not, people argue about such things. Is it all or is it every? And there's traction for both arguments. I conclude that all Scripture, it's the whole Bible, it's the Old and New. Many want to attack the New Testament. They say, "Well, that's Pauline or that's Markin that's really not inspired or inerrant."

And we will see as you study this, Peter refers to Paul's writings as Scripture. So there's what we call internal evidence that corroborates. The New Testament authors, I believe,

fully understood what they were writing was inspired. Not only are they referring to the old Scripture, but the New Testament, as we call it, as well. All Scripture.

Secondly, the word often pronounced theo-fanoo-stoos, now it's being pronounced theo-noostos, *theopneustos*, the idea that it is God-breathed. This word is what we call a *hopox*. You know this, it only occurs one time. *Hopox logomino*, sometimes. And when you come to a word in the Bible that only occurs once, it's a delightful experience because you can't go to other uses in the Bible to find out what it means. So you have to really do some careful study and that's what I love to do. Find out why did the author use that word? Why did God want that word used? And as you scratch your head and do some word studies and dig around and go a little further, you start finding some interesting ways the word may have come into existence.

Simply means "God-breathed." *Theos* – God. *pneus* – the idea of breath or wind. So the word is God-breathed. God superintends this. He uses His Holy Spirit so that when the men wrote the Bible they were God-breathed and directed to do it.

Now, I don't know how many of you know the car manufacturer Fiat. Anyone heard of a Fiat? A few of you have, okay. Did you ever own a Fiat? I feel sorry for you if you did. If you lived in Italy, great; if you live over here, it's a problem. Now, the word Fiat means one thing in the car realm, but in the English use it means that you speak something into existence.

When God spoke creation, boom, it happens. Read Genesis one today. "God said," "God said," "God said," and it happens. But in Genesis 2:7, he makes man a little differently, doesn't He? He makes man out of *adam*, out of the dirt, and what does he do in chapter two verse seven? He what? He breathes life into him. *Nefesh*, his soul. He becomes a living being. We often hear the expression "death rattle." When a person dies, if you've been by a bedside when a person dies, their breathing changes and when the breath is gone the person dies very soon after. Breath gives life.

So we have this wonderful, grand theology of the breath of God in His Word. He speaks things into existence. He **fiats** and it happens and when He creates His word, when He gives meaning to a context, God spoke and he puts His breath into it. Another way of saying this is all Scripture, the extent of it, all Scripture has the characteristic of God behind it.

Now, there's four functions that Paul gives us in this text. And they are in your Bible for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness. Teaching, of course, is the instructing of believers and I think, again it goes back to chapter three, verse fifteen. Remember Timothy, the sacred writings that you were taught (implication) that was able to lead you to salvation; all those Scriptures are inspired and profitable for teaching.

Secondly, reproof; a very unpopular concept today. Reproof or rebuke means to express strong disapproval of someone's sin. Rebukes a good word but rebuke almost sounds like a, you know, stab in someone's face. Reproof has the idea, the reason English translators use it, is that you're using proof to show someone their sin. You reproof them. So you'd show them the smoking gun, the videotape, the DNA evidence. You'd prove to them what they did was wrong.

The Scripture is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction. Another *hopox*,

another word that only occurs here. More than likely it means setting them straight. And lastly, training in righteousness. Now, the word training goes back to children, how you train a child.

So this extent, all of the Scripture, is God-breathed and it has metrics we might say. It's profitable for, for teaching someone; teaching them the Scripture, teaching them the way to salvation, teaching the wisdom of God. It's profitable for correction, for reproof and for training in righteousness.

Verse seventeen finishes it out. "So that" explanation, perhaps, exegetical; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped, for every good work.

The reason all Scripture being inspired and profitable, the reason that it's God-breathed for these functions, is so that the end result, what happens when you look at the God-breathed Scripture, is that we are changed, we are equipped to do the work God wants for us. Said another way: Put your confidence in the inspired, revealed Word of God, not in cleverness or not in some, you know, new thing, but put your confidence here because we're depending upon Him.

Cindy and I are very unreasonable parents. We expected our children to learn to brush their teeth. I can remember with each child from when we brushed them ourselves, you know, to teach them how, to when you coach them to start brushing their own teeth. And some children grab onto it quickly, some children have no time for brushing their teeth and so any good parent does what you're supposed to do, you inspect to see if your children have brushed their teeth. When their toothbrush is dry and they said they brushed their teeth, they're busted. [laughter] When their breath smells like it usually smells, they're busted. When their teeth are yellow, they are busted. So we teach them how.

I've expressed strong disapproval when my children lie to me or wet the toothbrush and lie to me. [laughter] I make them go back and correct it and brush again. Sometimes I've done it three times just to get the point across. I express strong disapproval, I correct them because, and I give them an egg timer – don't give them the time that you can turn because the can cheat on those. You give them the egg timer that's two or three minutes so they must painfully brush their – and they're going to cheat then, they're going to start it right when they go in the room, you know, so it doesn't work, but anyway – I'm training my children to have righteously clean teeth. [laughter] I'm teaching them, I'm reproofing them, I'm correcting them because I want to train them to do a good thing.

The Word of God is such. If you are in a Sunday School context, if you are teaching young people, adults, men and women, others; if you are a receiver of this, are you teaching it correctly? Are you reproofing on occasion, setting people straight on occasion for the purpose of training them righteously? That's the power of this document that we hold.

[Lepine:] Michael, some of our listeners have at home their copy of the Bible. Maybe they've got the New King James or the English Standard Version or and NIV or maybe they've got the New Living Translation or the Message or any of a variety of different representations. Are all of those inspired?

[Easley:] No. The only thing that is inspired is what we call the autograph. That would

be the actual writing of, we envision an apostle or one of the ancient prophets writing that down. Once that transmission has occurred from parchment then to translation and rendering, errors do occur, errors in copying, errors in translation. But what we hold in our hand, the New American Standard, the NIV, the New King James, these Bibles are so accurate. They are extraordinary – if you took all the questionable parts of those Bibles in let's say a three inch Bible, maybe two or three pages would be the question marks. What is this word? What was this phrase? So even though we've gone from Greek to Hebrew to Aramaic to German to Latin to French to English, you hold an incredibly reliable document that is the very word of God.

[Lepine:] And there's nothing in those questions that affects any essential -

[Easley:] Right.

[Lepine:] - understanding of God, salvation, man, all of the critical issues. We can rely on what we have in our English Bibles to teach us accurately about the things of God.

[Easley:] One of the best things a serious Bible student can do is to compare two or three English translations as you study. I'm a New American Standard guy because of the wooden literal rendering. ESV has done a great job, New King James has done a great job. And look at those side by side and the similarities outweigh the differences over and over again. You have an extremely reliable document in your hands.

[Lepine:] And I think if listeners have questions about the subject of inspiration, they ought to contact us and get a copy of the *Moody Handbook of Theology* which comes together with an MP3 CD of this entire sermon series and Bible studies on each of these subjects that tie together with the *Moody Handbook of Theology*. Go to our website, incontextradio.org, and the information you need about that particular resource is available there.

And, in fact, tomorrow we're going to continue to unpack the subject of inspiration. I hope you can be back with us for *inContext* with Michael Easley.