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Why We Believe What We Believe – Inspiration Part 2

[Easley:] It's not about tolerance and love and acceptance. Why you believe what you believe is crucial. It's a matter of an eternal destiny to people who are living a lie and deceived and you and I get to be a part of a community that believes this is the Word of God.

[Lepine:] This in *inContext* with Michael Easley, I'm Bob Lepine. And, Michael, we're looking at the subject of the inspiration of Scripture. I know as you were trained at Dallas Theological Seminary, one of the things that you spent many hours studying and learning was the original languages, Greek and Hebrew, for the Scriptures. Most of us don't know Greek and Hebrew. Is it possible for us to really know and understand the Bible without knowing the original languages?

[Easley:] I would say for a teacher it's pretty invaluable. Yes would be the short answer to your question. My friends in the linguistic realm who translate the Bible from unwritten languages into the text rely on Greek and Hebrew and some Aramaic and, fortunately Bob, with technology and tools, I'm a Logos Bible Software user, even if you don't have the luxury of going to seminary there's so many tools now at our disposal for people that would like to know more about the language. And it's very quick and easy to study it.

[Lepine:] So you would encourage a layman to take advantage of some of these tools and try to understand a little Greek and Hebrew?

[Easley:] Without reserve, yes. Would it be helpful for a medical student to know comparative anatomy or should he just jump right into surgery? [laughter] I mean, why do we look at the very word of God and say, "Oh, I can read the Living Bible or some paraphrase and that's sufficient." Nothing against the paraphrase concept, but let's go back and see what God did indeed say, and there is a richness and a texture and a manifold unpacking of these words that is such a wonderful privilege to have.

[Lepine:] Speaking of words, there's a word that is used about the Bible that maybe some of our listeners have heard and you might explain what it means. The Bible is referred to as having perspicuity. What does that mean?

[Easley:] Well, you just told me, it means the clarity of Scripture. [laughter] The idea that the average reader can open the Bible and with the mind God has given us, he/she can understand it. This, of course, is a great part of the reformation. The idea, let's put the word of God in people's hands.

[Lepine:] Mm hmm.

[Easley:] You don't need a priest or a religious person to help you. If God spoke to man, can man understand it? And absolutely, he can read it and understand it.

[Lepine:] Well, as we begin part two of this message on inspiration, you're giving us some insight into what that word means. When the Bible says that all Scripture is inspired, what should we understand about that? Well, we'll find out as we listen to part two of Michael's message on the inspiration of Scripture.

[Easley:] All Scripture, the extent of it, all Scripture has the characteristic of God behind

it.

Now, there are 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. Rebuke's 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 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 kind 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 reproving 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? Reproving on occasion? Setting people straight on occasion for the purpose of training them righteously? That's the power of this document that we hold.

I remember early on when I came to Christ, I came out of a pretty rough background, you know my story, most of you, and I had a pretty foul mouth. And my Christian friend who really helped me and disciplined me and I didn't even know what discipling was in those days, upbraided me one time when I said some four letter word. He just turned around and upbraided me. And I said, "What difference does it make?"

And he quoted Ephesians 4:29 to me. "Let no unwholesome word proceed out of your mouth."

He corrected me. It just took that one correction and from then on I was ever aware. The Bible is to teach, to reproof, to correct and to train us to be righteous. Can't be righteous if you have a foul mouth, Michael.

Stott writes, "Do we hope either in our own lives or in the teaching ministry to overcome error and to grow in truth, to overcome evil and grow in holiness? Then it is to the Scripture we must turn for the Scripture is profitable for these things."

Why we believe what we believe is not important, it's crucial men and women that you know what this Bible says to you and to me.

The second verse in our doctrinal statement is from Second Peter chapter one. Turn over there. Context is also important here. I'd like to read verses twenty and twenty-one. Second Peter, a little bit over to your right, Second Peter one, verses twenty and twenty-one. Peter writes:

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation,

For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

So secondly, then, Scripture is from God through man and first of all, Scripture is the word from God. I just want to nuance it a tiny bit and say Scripture is from God but here we see through man. Again, our context is important. Verses fifteen and sixteen we're learning the idea that, be confident not in some clever story but in clear facts. Don't let myths pull you away.

And, just again, as sort of a commercial break, when you read beyond the pale of commentaries and the Bible and solid Bible studies, and I'm not saying you shouldn't,

but when you read beyond the pale of those things or you read so-called Christian books that are not really moored and centered on the Bible, be very careful and discerning in your reading. I'm not saying don't read it, but I'm saying argue with it, challenge it. Don't assume it just because some person with a PhD says so. Dismantle it from the Bible because your inspired inerrant Word of God is clearer than clever mythology.

Now, Peter saw the transfiguration. That's the context. He was one of the three; James, John and Peter. And when he saw the transfiguration, a number of things occurred and that's to what he references here. He was an eyewitness of the majesty or the grandeur of Jesus Christ. It's a great passage to study if you haven't studied it in a while, to see this transfiguration before them. And thank God for Peter and the questions he asks because those are the questions we all want to ask.

"Lord, this is so cool. Let's hang out awhile and build three booths. Let's just stay here awhile. Isn't it good to be here?"

Hello, Peter. This isn't about you right now. And Peter looks back on that and he says, "I was an eyewitness."

Secondly he says, "I heard. I heard God. I heard God speak."

So, we have the eyewitness and the voice of God confirming who this Jesus Christ is. So what are we supposed to interpret from that? When we know something from the Biblical author who was an eyewitness and he's heard from God the traction in this passage is, that is the inerrant word of God.

Now, verses twenty and twenty-one are discussed and debated at great length. Prophets, here's my simple attempt to define it, prophets did not invent prophesy, prophesy came from God. That's the way I would put it on the lower shelf. Prophets did not invent prophesy, prophesy came from God.

We had no Ouija boards, we had no crystal balls, we had no plates and a hat. Prophesy came from God. Prophets did not say, "Ooo, let's invent it. Let's think about it. Let's prognosticate. Let's be Nostradamus."

No. These prophecies came from God. The phrase, "moved by the Holy Spirit" is very important. Many of you have already studied, for some it will be review. Moved has many different nuances the way the authors of the New Testament use it. It can mean to guide, to lead, to bring and to drive along. Listen to just one reference to put some color on the way the term is used. In Acts 27:15 we read:

and when the ship was caught in it [the storm] and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and let ourselves be driven along.

The storm was so bad they'd thrown the tackle overboard, they couldn't do anything more and they just let themselves be driven by the wind. That's a great picture of inspiration, isn't it? That God somehow through His Holy Spirit drove these men to write these words. Somehow He moved them to do that. It's a wonderful picture.

I had a professor in grad school that used to talk about the big "A" author and the little "a" author. One of them is God the Father, but yet He uses the human impress and style and personality of the individual.

Well, just a few observations before a concluding illustration. Number one, again, the Scripture is the Word of God and secondly, Scripture is from God through man. Let's talk about a couple terms very briefly: The words "verbal" and "plenary." We use those a lot, let's just define them so we all know what they mean. Verbal, of course, just means the word. Verbal inspiration would push against concept inspiration. There's sort of the concept in there, but it's not the word. We hold to, I hold to, a verbal inspiration. Not dictation. God did not need human authors if he wanted it dictated. He could have dictated it to an angel to put it on a parchment and hand it to man as a sacred document, but God, in His super intention, used men to put these words together.

We talk about the original autograph, secondly. Those were what you can envision Paul scratching those words on a parchment, Isaiah scratching them on a scroll. Those autographs were inerrant and, by the way, when you study textual criticism and how we got our Bible, your Bible is so accurate. The handful of problems and challenges would fit on a couple of pages of this Bible. If you put them all together, couple of pages. We've got an incredibly reliable document that we hold; so verbal and autograph.

Thirdly, the word "plenary." We say verbal plenary inspiration. Plenary is a fancy word for full. It's that concept of all of it. Paul's writings sometimes are vilified. Many people say, "Oh, that's Pauline." Which is really odd to me.

By the way, here's a real interesting test for you when people attack part of the Bible. And I don't want to just glom and say "liberals who attack the Bible," because many people we would call conservative no longer hold to the doctrine of inerrancy. Very few seminaries and Bible colleges in the U.S. hang onto a verbal plenary inspiration. Most of them have moved away from it very subtly but very clearly and what they will say is, they'll say, "Well, because Paul held this harsh doctrine, it must not be inerrant."

Now, think about this for just a moment. When do the people who attack inerrancy ever attack, "Well, God really isn't loving. We're not supposed to be merciful and kind. We can't trust that passage because that's and Old Testament passage about mercy.?"

And so we compartmentalize our use of the doctrine of inerrancy and inspiration to attack something we don't like. See what I mean? Seldom where a person who is against inerrancy and inspiration attack something they like in the Bible. They only use it as a wet stone to sharpen their issue that it's too Pauline or it's too New Testament or some other ridiculous statement. When Peter endorses Paul's writing as God's Word, when the New Testament apostles hand those letters to us, this is not Pauline, men and women. This is God using Paul to give you and me a book. This is God using Isaiah to give you and me a book. This is God using Moses for Moses' authorial leadership. This is God using David as he wrote a Psalm, a lyric, a hymn. So don't just run away with the sort of a notion that, "Oh well, it's too this or too that," verbal plenary, all of it.

Charles Ryrie writes, "Inspiration is God's superintendence of the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error his revelation to man in the words of the original autographs."

It's really good. That's a really good statement. Someone said, "Language is human, the message is divine." And that's the book you hold.

I got a book the other day in the mail from a publisher, from Nos Press. Brand new book out by Sam Harris called *Letter to a Christian Nation*. Lest you think the issues of inerrancy and inspiration are unimportant, listen to what Sam Harris writes in the beginning of his book:

“You believe the Bible is the Word of God and that Jesus is the Son of God and that only those who place their faith in Jesus Christ will find salvation after death. As a Christian, you believe these propositions not because they make you feel good, but because you think they’re true. Before I point out some of the problems with these beliefs, I would like to acknowledge that there are many points on which you and I agree. We agree, for instance, that if one of us is right, the other is wrong.

“The Bible is either the Word of God or it isn’t. Either Jesus offers humanity the one true path of salvation [and then he cites John 14:6] or he does not. We agree that to be a true Christian is to believe that all other faiths are mistaken and profoundly so. If Christianity is correct and I persist in my unbelief, then I should expect the torments of hell. Worse still, I have persuaded others and many close to me to reject the very idea of God. They too will languish in eternal fire (Matthew 25:41). If the basic doctrine of Christianity is correct, I have misused my life in the worst conceivable way. I admit this without a single caveat.

“The fact that my continuous and public rejection of Christianity does not worry me in the least should suggest to you how inadequate I think your reasons for being a Christian are.”

I don’t know if it makes your blood boil, but it about sent me out of the roof. And he’s exactly right. One of us is right and one of us is wrong. Why you believe what you believe is not important, men and women. It’s not about tolerance and love and acceptance. Why you believe what you believe is crucial. It’s a matter of an eternal destiny for people who are living a lie and deceived and you and I get to be a part of a community who believes 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:] As you were saying, “Read it. Read it. Read it,” I was thinking of the scene in the garden as Saint Augustine was listening to little school children walking by and they were chanting, “Tolle lege! Tolle lege!”, “Take up and read,” in the Latin.

And that’s what he did. He took the Bible that was sitting on the table, opened it and started reading in Romans and was converted to Christ -

[Easley:] Yeah.

[Lepine:] – reading the Scriptures. Now, some would be concerned that private study leads to private interpretation, -

[Easley:] Sure.

[Lepine:] - which leads to error. How do we be faithful to study the Bible and yet guard ourselves against the possibility of error?

[Easley:] Well, again, today with technology and Bible software and the internet, there are extraordinary resources available. We fall into an evangelical fundamental camp and these doctrines that we're addressing in this series keep us moored so that we don't get off into error. And so I'm checking myself constantly against commentaries, against people that know the Bible and subjects about the Bible better than me. So whenever you get a new idea, it's probably a bad idea. [laughter]

So, you need to go back to, you use the word "orthodox" a lot. That's straight teaching. *Ortho* – straight teaching. And the idea is we want to be moored to what the text tells us and another part of this, Bob, is to be in a church where the Scripture is clearly taught.

[Lepine:] Mm hmm.

[Easley:] Because God does empower and enable certain people who are gifted at studying and unpacking the Scripture and that keeps us checked and online.

[Lepine:] And be on the alert against those who might say, "I found something new in the Scripture, -"

[Easley:] Right.

[Lepine:] "- something that has never been seen before."

[Easley:] Run away! Run away!

[Lepine:] [laughter] Because over the centuries, most of the essential doctrines of Scripture have been looked at, prayed over, understood, reflected on. When somebody comes up with a new private interpretation, we need to be on guard, don't we?

[Easley:] Yes. Yes. Danger Will Robinson. [laughter]

[Lepine:] You know, that's one of the reasons why we suggest to people that they get a reliable study guide like the *Moody Handbook of Theology*. This is a book that has been around for decades and has provided clear guidance on the Scriptures to hundreds of thousands of Bible students over the past decades. And in conjunction with our current series on "Why We Believe What We Believe," we're making available the *Moody Handbook of Theology* together with a CD that includes mp3 audio tracks from all of these messages from Michael Easley. And there's a companion Bible study that goes through each of these subjects and ties together with the *Moody Handbook of Theology*. So, you can really dig deeply into why we believe what we believe about the Bible, the trinity, inspiration, about who Jesus is, about salvation, the ministry of the Holy Spirit and about Satan. Get more information by going to our website, incontextradio.org. That's incontextradio.org or call us toll-free at 877-3CONTEXT. That's 877-3CONTEXT.

Now, tomorrow we're going to start to look at why we believe what we believe about who Jesus is. And I hope you can be with us for tomorrow's edition of *inContext* with Michael Easley.