

LESSON 4:

Rediscovering Hedeeemings Love

A Word from God

Getting Started

The Roman Catholic Church began to evolve under the Roman emperor Constantine following the first *world* council, the Council at Nicaea, in 325. Constantine attempted to use Christianity to unite his divided Roman Empire by making it the state religion. The Roman Catholic Church, however, did not become the *official* state religion until the rule of Theodosius in 391. (Find these dates on Chart 1, *Summary of Church History*. Also see margin note on heresy.) As the church began to be controlled by the state (later the state was actually controlled by the church), the access to the Scriptures was denied to the layman. What has been called the *Dark Ages* began. During this 1,000-year period, the church leaders did not use Scripture as the only basis for authority from God and often *made up their own truth* in order to accommodate their own agenda. They perverted the image of God in such a way that He was not even recognizable as the God of the Bible. He was not presented as a God of love, but rather as a God to be feared. There was no one to *check* the church leaders on what they handed down as doctrine. Whereas Constantine, and his state religion, plunged the world into darkness, it was the Renaissance that offered the first ray of light.

By the time of the Renaissance (1450), the common people still did not have access to the Word of God. Today they have access, but they don't read it. You and I are living in another *dark age*. According to *Theological Studies.Org*, "Most Americans own a Bible. In fact, 92% of households in America own at least one copy. Of those households that own a Bible, the average number of Bibles is three. This includes not only the homes of practicing Christians, but hundreds of thousands of atheists as well."

James Sawyer, in his book, *The Survivor's Guide to Theology* says: "A New Testament professor at a major evangelical seminary has commented on several occasions that while evangelical scholarship has never been at a higher level, it is as if in the churches we have entered a new 'dark ages' with reference to the knowledge of Scripture. I would add that the darkness extends to the knowledge of theology." God has revealed His character in His Word, but no one bothers to read and discover it.

John Wycliffe (1370-1371), an English priest and diplomat, is often called "the morning star of the Reformation," because he believed Scripture should be available to the people in their own language. People inspired by Wycliffe (called Lollards which means "*mumblers*") translated the entire Bible into English (1382) from Latin. This first English translation was called the *Wycliffe Bible*. Soon after, in Germany, John Gutenberg invented the printing press and in 1456 he printed the Bible (Latin Vulgate) with moveable metal type. (See Chart 2 for these dates.) With these two events, the dawning of new light broke through the Dark Ages and the

Americans believed absolute moral truth was 38% in January, 2000; it had dropped to 22% by November 2001.

—Barna Research

The term **heresy** is derived from the Greek word **haireisthai**, which means **to choose**. This makes it a matter of not only the head, but also the heart. Heresy is the opposite of orthodoxy. Orthodoxy generally has been used to refer to the decision of the first four Ecumenical Councils of the church (between A.D. 325 and 451). Heresy often panders to the natural desire of the fallen human heart, and the way people wish they are, instead of the way God has established them to be.

—Taken from
M. James Sawyer's
***The Survivor's Guide
to Theology***

spiritual Renaissance began to unfold. So what is preventing people from reading and relying on God’s Word today? One reason, of course, is apathy. Another reason is the prevailing worldview known as *postmodernism*, which has permeated all aspects of our culture. Postmodernism, in essence, believes that *truth is whatever one person believes*. In other words, the Bible is not the *only* truth; and God did not describe Himself in His Word in absolutes, so “you believe what you want to about God and I will believe what I want to about God.” Every man and woman can have his or her own personal truth. Now that is convenient. No necessity to read God’s Word if your opinion is that it is simply one truth among many. Certainly there is no reason to base your life on what it says. This rationale is what believers are up against today.

The deeply entrenched ideas of postmodernism have made the New Age religion the fastest growing religion in America today. New Age belief allows every individual to construct his own religion and make no truth claims on anyone else. The New Age movement has created a deity out of *tolerance*. Their belief is that everyone can find his own way to God—through Buddhism, Islam, Scientology, Judaism, mediums, horoscopes, and even Christianity.

What we need is a modern Renaissance. Christians today not only need to get the Bible in people’s hands, but they must somehow be able to prove that it is God’s truth—and the *only* truth!

The thoughts for this week are:

Inspiration of Scripture

Infallibility of Scripture

Inerrancy of Scripture

Inspiration of Scripture

So how do we prove that the Bible is truth? It comes down to a simple question: “Did God write the Bible or not? If people are to believe that the Bible is true, then it must first be established that it is a *Word from God*—the *only* Word from God. (And, of course, if they don’t believe in God that makes it even more difficult.) 2 Timothy 3:16 says:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Paul uses the Greek word *theopneust* in the above verse. It is translated *God-breathed*. Though the word is usually translated *inspired*, which means to *breathe in*, the word technically means to *breath out*. The Scripture was literally *breathed out* from God. That makes the origin of Scripture God Himself. R.C. Sproul says: “The doctrine of inspiration declares that God enabled the human writers of Scripture to be agents of divine revelation, so that what they wrote was not only their writing, but in a higher sense the very Word of God.”

The reformers held a high view of the Bible’s inspiration and referred to God’s Word as *verbum Dei*, or the *voice of God*.

1. (a) How does 2 Peter 1:21 say that the prophecy in the Word of God was given to the writers?

- (b) What does I Corinthians 2:12-13 say about how God’s Word came to us and how we are able to interpret it?

3. Jesus validated the scriptures by quoting them frequently. What does He say about the Bible in John 17:17?

4. (a) There were times when God actually did apparently give out written words. Read Exodus 31:18 and Daniel 5:4-5. What such instances do these verses describe?

“But since no daily responses are given from heaven, and the Scriptures are the only records in which God has been pleased to consign his truth to perpetual remembrance, the full authority which they ought to possess with the faithful is not recognized, unless they are believed to have come from heaven, as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them.”

–John Calvin

*The word **inspiration** is translated from the Greek word **theopneust**, which means **God-breathed**.*

(b) Do you believe that you would pay more attention if God spoke to you from heaven, through the voice of a living prophet, or wrote His message on a tablet or a wall? Would you believe or obey such words more readily than you do Scripture? Why or why not?

(c) If you do believe that God is speaking directly to you in His Word, what steps can you take to better understand the message He has given to you?

- The Bible claims that it is the Word of God.
- Jesus claims the Bible is the Word of God.
- If the Bible is the Word of God, then we should strive to understand and obey every word.

Truth for Today: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16*

Infallibility of Scripture

The reformers were convinced that because the Bible had its origin in God, and was *breathed* directly to man from God Himself, that it was *infallible*. *Infallible* means *without error*. God's Word is incapable of being false or failing. When we say God's Word is infallible, then what we are really saying is that God is infallible.

One cannot claim *inspiration* and then deny *infallibility*. God *never* inspired error! To inspire error would mean that God is not omniscient or all knowing. And to say that God is incapable of correctly revealing His Word would be to claim that He is not omnipotent or all powerful. Either way, God's character is degraded.

R.C. Sproul says: "The whole controversy over the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible is fundamentally a controversy about supernatural revelation. Reformed theology is committed to Christianity as a *revealed* faith, a faith that rests, not on human insight, but on information that comes to us from God himself." Really what you come to believe about inspiration and infallibility is a reflection on what you believe about God himself. It is another case of making sure to acquire correct doctrine about God. Because, if your doctrine is off even to the smallest degree, it will affect your whole belief system. Remember what Sproul said: "Any distortion of the character of God poisons the rest of our theology." What you should have discovered by now is that we are building a house of theology. With the doctrines of God and the Word of God, we are laying a foundation that we will build on for the rest of the study. Pay attention so that you will build correctly. Remember what Paul said about getting your doctrine correct in I Corinthians 3: 10-14:

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

The foundation for any theology is God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit who are all One. Let's be careful how we build! Each brick we add is crucial.

1. Look up the following verses and write beside each one what it says.

Titus 1:2-3 _____

Hebrews 6:17-18 _____

2 Samuel 7:28 _____

2. When you read God's Word, do you believe that it is *infallible* and that God is incapable of lying? Explain your answer.

...63 percent of Americans deny the knowability of moral truth, as do 53 percent of evangelicals. Among teenagers, the next generation of leaders, only 8 percent acknowledge there is moral truth.

—Charles Colson,
The Good Life

The big lie of communism has all but vanished. But we live with another in its place. Tragically in our times we are all greengrocers who have placed in our shop windows placards declaring, 'There is no such thing as truth!' 'Tolerance is god!' 'Diversity must rule at all costs!'

The big lie of the West is that there are no absolutes—only subjective truths that compete with one another.

—Charles Colson,
The Good Life

3. Do you know of any proven fact in all of history that has shown something in the Bible to be false? Can that be said of other religious writings, such as the *Book of Mormon* or the Muslim's *Qur'an*?

4. (a) What is the postmodern worldview (see the *Getting Started* in this lesson) and how would it contrast to the belief that God's Word is infallible?

(b) How have you seen people's lives being impacted by the postmodern worldview?

(c) What would you say to someone who does not believe the Bible is infallible because of the influence of this worldview?

- Infallibility means *without error*.
- God's Word is infallible because it is impossible for God to lie.
- The postmodern worldview does not believe that there is one absolute truth, but that everyone can claim his *own* truth.

Truth for Today: *O Sovereign Lord, you are God! Your words are trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant. 2 Samuel 7:28*

Inerrancy of Scripture

In addition to believing that God's Word is *infallible*, reformers also believed that it was *inerrant*. What is the difference between *infallible* and *inerrant*? Infallibility means that something *cannot* err. Inerrancy means that it *does not* err. Here is Wayne Grudem's definition of inerrancy: "The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact."

Because the original manuscripts are no longer available (see margin), many people scoff at the Bible's inerrancy. They say validity can't be established without original manuscripts. But the original manuscripts can be reconstructed with remarkable accuracy. R.C. Sproul gives this example: "Suppose the normative yardstick housed at the National bureau of Standards were to perish in a fire. Would we no longer be able to determine the distance of three feet with accuracy? With the multitude of existing copies, we could reconstruct with almost perfect accuracy the original yardstick. To restrict inerrancy to the original documents is to call attention to the source of biblical revelation: the agents who were inspired by God to receive his revelation and record it."

The original manuscripts of the Bible are called the **autographa**. The **autographa**, the initial works of the writers of Scripture, are not available to us today.

1. Read the following Scriptures and describe what each says about God's truthfulness.

Numbers 23:19 _____

Psalms 12:6 _____

Proverbs 30:5 _____

Matthew 24:35 _____

The word *inerrancy* has elicited a firestorm of controversy among scholars. In academic circles today, the term is sometimes looked down on because it is often used to describe unscholarly types of fundamentalism. These same scholars, however, believe the term *infallibility* has a history of academic respectability, particularly among Roman Catholics, who were the only religious academics for many centuries. It is important to understand that some amount of academic snobbery many scholars will not use the word *inerrancy*. However, it is impossible to deny that the concept was embraced by Augustine, who said in a letter to St. Jerome: "I have learned to hold only the Holy Scripture inerrant." And it was also embraced by the sixteenth century reformers. Martin Luther himself said: "We intend to glory in nothing but Holy Scripture and we are certain that the Holy Spirit cannot oppose or contradict Himself."

Men may argue over whether or not Scripture is *inerrant*, but we have seen that Jesus had no trouble acknowledging it. Remember in John 17:17, in what has been called *Jesus' High Priestly Prayer*, He prayed to God the Father:

Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

Inerrancy really only claims what Jesus Himself said about the Bible.

While the reformers claimed the inerrancy of Scripture, they fiercely denied the inerrancy of the church's interpretations. This created a conflict with the Roman Church.

2. On Chart 3, *Reformation Time Line*, read the events between 1519 through 1520. What is most interesting to you here about Martin Luther's struggle with the Roman Church?

3. If you thought there were some small errors affirmed by Scripture, how do you think it would affect the way you read, understand, and obey it?

4. Does belief in inerrancy guarantee sound doctrine and a sound Christian life? Why or why not?

5. (a) Why do you think the debate about inerrancy has become such a large issue in this century?

- (b) Do you believe the doctrine of inerrancy is an important issue for the future of the church? Why or why not?

- Infallibility means that something *cannot* err. Inerrancy means that it *does not* err.
- God is incapable of lying and He says His words are *flawless*.
- Inerrancy only claims what Jesus Himself taught about the Bible.

Truth for Today: *And the words of the Lord are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times.* Psalm 12:6