

## **The inerrancy and authority of Scripture**

### **Discuss**

What would you say in response to this quote from last week's *Daily Telegraph*. It's from an opinion piece written by Jemima Thackray, a professing Christian who is an Anglican lay chaplain in Winchester:

We Christians must face it: the Bible is hugely misogynistic... It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that so many people with modern liberal values are rejecting the church, unable to square their own sense of what's right and wrong on issues like gender and sexuality with teachings taken from a book written over a thousand years ago. The irony is that the church is increasingly being seen, no longer as a repository for ethical guidance, but as a force for immorality in society.<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

*Are there any mistakes in the Bible?* After all, there are plenty of people (some of whom call themselves Christians) who would say that the Bible is certainly full of mistakes and contradictions since it was written by human beings in the far distant past.

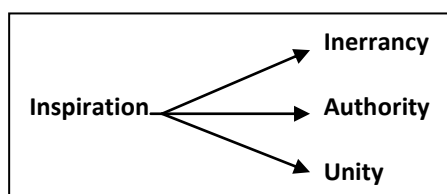
*What difference does it make if God really does speak to us in the Bible?* Why does it follow that we should believe and obey it, or believe and obey every part of it? Can't we pick and choose the bits that we like?

We've already begun to answer some of those questions. God is a speaking God. He reveals himself. He reveals himself in the Bible, which is not only the words of men but the words of God. The Bible is "inspired" by God (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16). It has its origin in Him. It is His word to us. What we're going to see in this session is that:

1. The Bible is *inerrant*: whatever Scripture says – properly understood – is true
2. The Bible is *authoritative*: God exercises his right to rule through His word

Crucially, both those statements flow from what God is like. The character of God determines what the Bible is like. Because God authored the Bible (what we saw in our first session) and it therefore reflects His character. What the author is like affects the book he has written. So we'll see that because God is perfectly powerful and perfectly trustworthy the Bible is without error and is authoritative.

In other words, two of the implications of the inspiration of Scripture are its *inerrancy* and its *authority*. Another implication which we're not looking at is the *unity* of Scripture (it is 66 books written by many human authors over centuries, and yet the Bible is one book that coheres and tells us the one story of salvation; or put another way, the divine inspiration of Scripture means it's possible (and extremely important) to learn how the whole Bible fits together).



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<sup>1</sup> Jemima Thackray, "We Christians must face it: the Bible is hugely misogynistic," *Daily Telegraph*, 13 February 2014

## **The Bible is inerrant: whatever Scripture says – properly understood – is true**

### **1. Definition: “verbal inerrancy”**

What does that phrase mean? The word “inerrant” means “entirely true and without error.” To speak of the “verbal inerrancy” of the Bible means that it is true right down to its individual words. It’s not just broadly true or largely true, but entirely true.<sup>2</sup>

Consider for a moment how *you* respond when you hear that phrase: “the Bible is inerrant”?

“Of course it is. Why do we even need to say that?”

“I’m not sure. Maybe there are a few mistakes or contradictions. And aren’t there problems in how the Bible tells us about history, the natural world and creation?”

“Why does this even matter? It’s enough that the big ideas in the Bible are true. The little details are irrelevant.”

Our aim is to see what inerrancy implies and why it matters very much.

### **2. Faith rests on a God who is truthful**

It’s important to understand what Christian faith is (and isn’t). The important thing about saving faith is *not* faith itself, but the object in which your faith is placed. In whom have you placed your trust? Real faith rests on a God who is utterly truthful.

Sometimes real Christians will waver in their faith, because of their personality, life experiences or sin. But whether the strength of our faith increases or decreases does not in any way change God. He is still utterly trustworthy.

Listen to these words from the book of Hebrews, that speak of the trustworthiness of God and his words:

<sup>ESV</sup> Hebrews 6:17-18, So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath,<sup>18</sup> so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

They’re complex verses! Yet here we learn this:

- God’s purpose is to give Christian people a sure and certain hope
- The Christian has every encouragement to hold on to that hope
- God has assured us of his purpose by making a promise and then swearing an oath (to Abraham, in Genesis 22).
- This promise and this oath are two unchangeable things in which God cannot lie

In other words, our hope and salvation are founded on God’s character. He doesn’t change and he doesn’t (and cannot) lie. This is wonderful news, because the Gospel calls us to surrender ourselves wholly to Jesus. And the Jesus to whom we come is totally trustworthy and true. (Just imagine how awful it would be to live for a Lord who was of doubtful integrity and truthfulness).

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<sup>2</sup> 1. More specifically, we believe that the original manuscripts, not copies or translations, are inspired. Neglect or sinfulness has given rise to a few errors in copying and in translation. For example, the Latin Vulgate translation rendered the Greek word *metanoia* as “do penance” rather than “repent;” this both reflected and perpetuated a fundamental Roman Catholic error. More recently, the Revised Standard Version English translation showed its doctrinal bias by using the word “expiation” in Romans 3:25 when “propitiation” was a better and clearer term; the editors disliked the idea that God’s wrath needed to be turned aside or propitiated, choosing to insert a term that spoke simply of the cleansing of sin. Hence it is important that scholars go back to and compare the earliest manuscripts. It is worth noting that we possess extremely good manuscript evidence. Whilst the hand of God didn’t allow the originals to survive (perhaps to prevent idolatry?), the preservation of the Bible text in early copies and translations is extraordinary.

But how is it that we come to Jesus and surrender in the first place? What does it look like to live a life of ongoing faith in Christ? The answer is this: by believing the words of God's promise, the words of the Gospel promise. For, saving faith is expressed by believing the words of God's promise.

### **3. Faith rests on the truthful Words of God.**

If God's Word the Bible were not true we would have no foundation to our faith. But wonderfully it is entirely true. Jesus tells us in John 17:17 that "... your word is truth." Here he sums up the thought of the whole Bible. God's word is true. And it's true in two ways:

- **God's word is completely honest.** It doesn't try to deceive us. And it isn't deceived itself. Contrast that with human words: we lie and we are lied to. Not so with God's Word.
- **Through the Word God accomplishes exactly what he says he will do.** Compare that to our experience. We sometimes promise sincerely, but lack the ability to keep our word. God is different. His word is never failing. (We'll consider this truth more deeply when we come in a subsequent session to consider the *sufficiency* of Scripture).

For now we will simply see how faith rests on the truthful words of God:

<sup>ESV</sup> Titus 1:1-3 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, <sup>2</sup> in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began <sup>3</sup> and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior;

God has made a promise – the "hope of eternal life." That hope is guaranteed, because God "never lies." Where do we find that hope? It's in "his word" and in "the preaching" of the apostles. Our trust in God rests on his truthfulness and on his truthful words.

This is the constant refrain of Scripture. Notice, for example, in Isaiah 40:1-5 why God's promise is certain:

<sup>ESV</sup> Isaiah 40:1-5, Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. <sup>3</sup> A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. <sup>5</sup> And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

There are wonderful promises in these verses – promises of comfort, of forgiveness, of the coming of God, of the revelation of God's glory. But how do we know it is true? Verse 5 tells us simply, "For the mouth of the Lord has spoken." And as if to back up the trustworthiness of God's words verse 8 goes on to remind us that "the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands for ever."

Our point thus far is simple. Faith requires the inerrant word of God, a word that is entirely true and without error. If the word of God were not perfectly true, then we destroy the faith that relates us to God. If we were able to cast doubt on Scripture, then we would call into question the promises of Scripture and the God of the Bible himself. (E.g. in Matthew 28:20 Jesus promises that "I am with you always, to the end of the age." But if the Bible were not inerrant we would be left thinking, "But are you really with us?")

### **4. Some objections**

Plenty of people – including some in the wider church – say that there is error in the Bible. Perhaps:

Doctrinal error: e.g. the Bible's wrong when it says God knows the future

Ethical error: e.g., the Bible's teaching on human sexual relationships is wrong

Factual error: e.g. the way the Bible describes the creation of the world is wrong

Here are some of the things you might have heard said, together with our responses:

- ***“The Bible is authored by humans, so of course it must have mistakes.”***

But though authored by humans, the Bible is not a human book. Its writers wrote as they were driven along by God the Holy Spirit (remember 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21).

- ***“Inerrancy doesn’t matter. It’s the ideas in the Bible that count. It doesn’t matter if there are a few mistakes.”***

But the gospel is rooted in truth and in historical fact (e.g. the fact that Christ died and on the third day was raised). It is not the idea of Christ’s death and resurrection that matters, it is the *historical fact* of it. Plus, to attribute any error to the Bible is to attribute error to God (“God, you made a mistake”).

- ***“The Bible is infallible, not inerrant – and that’s all it claims to be.”***

Until about 35 years ago the words “inerrant” and “infallible” were used interchangeably. But since then they’ve (often) been used to mean different things.

The infallibilist says that there may be unimportant issues where Bible *is* factually wrong, whilst being true and reliable in the important things (which are to do with salvation and godly living). This, they say, is the limit of its truthfulness and all that the Bible ever was intended to speak about. In matters like history or science there may well be mistakes.

This, however, is a false and dangerous argument. It confuses the major purpose of the Bible (faith and godliness) with its scope which is total (and which does include matters of history and science, etc).

Inerrancy insists that the Bible is free from all falsehood or deceit, because of the person from whom it originates. The Bible comes from a God who is all-knowing and who never lies.

- ***“Human words can never tell us truth about God.”***

Sometimes it’s said that God is so big (so “transcendent”) and so different from us that human language is incapable of telling us what he is really like. This is a really common view in liberal theology. Rowan Williams, the former archbishop of Canterbury, once (in)famously likened God’s communication with us to the inarticulate groans of a spastic child. The result is that we are left free to form our own views of God and of Jesus – all of which are supposedly legitimate.

This is a wicked and deceitful way of arguing. It (deliberately?) forgets that the one true God *desires* to communicate with us, has made us *able* to receive communication from him (this is a feature of being made in God’s image), and through the work of Word and Spirit truly *does communicate with us*.

Whilst the Bible-believing Christian certainly doesn’t have *exhaustive* knowledge of God, we do have a true and *sufficient* knowledge in his wholly truthful word.

Of course, we must note that God speaks to us in the Bible without error *when it is properly understood*. We need to follow the Bible’s own tools of interpretation. And we are capable of getting it wrong.

But we must refuse to say there is any problem in God or in His word. Yes, it is written by humans. But it is also authored by the perfect God. As Peter Jensen has noted: “It is not for us to put it aside or to pass judgement on it. Our own ignorance and lack of discernment should constantly remind us of the limits of our reason.”

## **5. Implication: when there's a disagreement, assume God's word is right and we're wrong**

We mustn't pick up God's Word looking to pick holes in it, but to sit humbly under it. Different voices may encourage us to sit in judgement on God's Word (liberal vicars and bishops, the popular media, the new atheists, our own sinful nature).

When we come to the Bible we do so with inerrancy as our prior assumption. This is a key distinctive of being a true evangelical.

And when we come to what we consider a "problem" (be it doctrinal, or ethical, or factual) we must remember that the problem is in us and not in the word of God.<sup>3</sup>

Whilst we may not be able to explain exhaustively every "problem" that we encounter, we are convinced that, in principle, all may be sufficiently explained.<sup>4</sup>

Above all, we need to work harder at understanding the Bible, using responsible tools for interpretation. And we need to work harder at praying for understanding, at believing, and at obeying.<sup>5</sup>

Real understanding of the Bible is an understanding that leads to our salvation and our transformation, and it brings glory to God. That kind of knowledge of God's word begins and continues from a position of faith. It does not and can not begin from a position of scepticism. After all, Christian knowledge is personal – it's about a relationship with a person. So, whatever our worries or questions, we approach Scripture believing and assuming that God wants to communicate with us and is able to do so perfectly – because he loves us.

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<sup>3</sup> When we encounter what appears to be a contradiction it's usually the case that further work on the Biblical text reveals there isn't a problem at all. For example, the description of Saul's conversion in Acts 9:7 says that the men with him heard the voice from heaven, whereas Acts 22:9 says that they didn't hear. However, closely inspection reveals that the same Greek verb is used but with different cases (accusative and genitive, respectively), signalling a distinction in meaning. Thus, the ESV's "did not understand" is a good translation in 22:9.

<sup>4</sup> Some other factors may be born in mind when we come up against "problems" in the Bible. Sometimes Bible writers use approximation, hyperbole or metaphor – none of which undermines truth. Also, some passages are "phenomenological" rather than "scientific" (e.g. in speaking of the sun "rising"). The Bible writers are selective in what they include, though they do give us God's view on history. The Bible doesn't talk about everything (e.g. car maintenance!); but wherever it does speak it does so truthfully, and all areas of truth and knowledge are informed by the Bible.

<sup>5</sup> We won't discover truth if we interpret the Bible wrongly. How do we go about good interpretation? There are excellent resources to help us, e.g. Sach and Beynon's *Dig Deeper*. But a few key principles may be summarised thus: (i) be aware of the literary genre which a Bible writer is using – narrative, poetry, etc; (ii) don't read verses or passages in isolation from their wider context – this is probably the easiest way to distort or twist the Bible; (iii) work out the author's intention in any given Bible passage – what is his aim?

## **The Bible is authoritative: God exercises his right to rule through it**

Here we move to a second implication of the divine inspiration of Scripture. Not only is the Bible inerrant, it is also authoritative. What does that mean? We're going to understand that term in two parts:

1. The Bible has supreme authority because it is authored by God
2. God rules his people through the Bible, and saving faith is responding to the words of God

### **1. The Bible has supreme authority because it is authored by God**

- **"supreme authority": definition and disagreement**

When we talk about "authority" we're talking about *who is in charge*. When we speak of "supreme authority" we imply that there are other authorities (e.g. governments, parents, etc.), but that no other authority is equal to Scripture. Rather, any other authority is either delegated by God or is a false authority.

Of course, as sinful human beings we do not like someone else wielding "authority." The heart of sin is self-rule. That's why a small child might shout at its mother, "You're not in charge, mummy, I am!" In particular, 21<sup>st</sup> century western culture (more than other times and places) hates the idea that we are under the legitimate rule of another.

But the gospel is about authority. It tells us that Jesus is not just a saviour. Jesus is Lord. Salvation means submission to the rule of our great and gracious King.

Where authority is concerned there will always be disagreements. After all, it happened to Jesus!

<sup>ESV</sup> Mark 7:1-5, Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. <sup>3</sup> (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands, holding to the tradition of the elders, <sup>4</sup> and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) <sup>5</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"

It seems like a trivial incident. The Old Testament said that *priests* should wash. But that Pharisees extended that command to all people, by reason of "the tradition of the elders." Jesus disagreed, implying that the Pharisees did not have authority to make that kind of judgement. And there will always be disagreement over which authorities may legitimately rule over us.

- **Competing authorities: Bible, reason, institution and experience**

Consider the various authorities that compete for our allegiance. There are four. Bible, reason, institution and experience. They form a memorable acronym: "BRIE"!

What is a right use of reason, of institutions and traditions, and of experience? How do these human authorities relate to the Bible which is the authoritative word of God?

We're going to see that there is a legitimate place for each of these in the life of every Christian. But we're also going to see that each is in grave danger of taking over from the Bible as God's Supreme Authority in our lives:

Consider "**reason.**" There is a right use of reason. God wants us to use our minds, to understand scripture and to apply it to the world around us. The Christian faith is not irrational. The Lord calls us to love the Him with all our mind.

*But*, there is a wrong use of human reason, when we imagine that our minds can sit in judgement on the word of God.

Consider “**institution or tradition.**” There is a right place of institution. God has arranged for there to be churches, families, and governments. He wants there to be teachers in our churches. Those are good things, so long as they don’t steal authority from God. And there is a right place for tradition. It is good to listen to Christians from the past and to think long and hard before we dismiss their opinions or practices.

*But*, there is a wrong attachment to institution and tradition. Very easily a church or religious leader can acquire the status of God. Their words come become weightier than Scripture. This is true of the Roman Catholic church, and it’s one reason why the Reformation was so important. It’s also a feature of more extreme charismatics and of cults. But we also need to remember that we have institutions and traditions. Could it be that we would ever set aside the word of God because of our traditions?

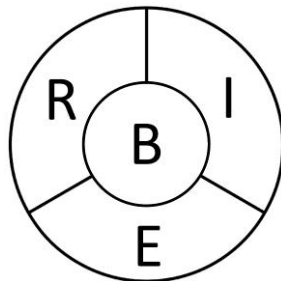
Consider “**experience.**” There is a right place for experience in the life of the Christian. The gospel impacts our whole being – our minds, our emotions, our experiences. What that looks like in practice varies from person to person. But, simply, being a Christian is experiential.

*But*, there is a wrong attachment to experience. Our experiences can become determinative and authoritative. They can become like God to us. This is a feature of those who seek to justify multi-faith worship and of aspects of charismatic theology and practice. But it is both idolatrous and disastrous to place experience alongside Scripture. This is a real issue for all of us. We’ll think more deeply about some of these issues in later sessions when we examine the sufficiency of Scripture, and look at questions surrounding prophecy and guidance.

So, there is a place for Reason, Institution, and Experience in the life of a Christian or a church. But none of them is our supreme authority. The Bible is our supreme rule and authority.

- **Implication: let the Bible rule us**

We could imagine these four authorities relating to each other in this diagram.



The position of the evangelical Christian is to stay in the “B” box, while making Biblical use of reason, institution and experience. But as soon as we make one of these other authorities determinative or authoritative we have left behind Biblical Christianity and are in a dangerous and disobedient place.

How serious a thing is it to abandon the Bible as your supreme authority? Listen to Jesus’ words:

<sup>ESV</sup> Mark 7:6-13, And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "" This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; <sup>7</sup> in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." <sup>8</sup> You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men." <sup>9</sup> And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! <sup>10</sup> For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' <sup>11</sup> But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban' (that is, given to God)- <sup>12</sup> then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, <sup>13</sup> thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do."

We must read the Bible and submit tradition, reason and experience to it. The warning in Mark 7 is terrifying. We can imagine that we are pleasing God. But if in practice God's word is a lower authority than Jesus words apply to us: hypocrite, lip-service, a heart that is far from Christ, and empty worship.

Here is a good question to ask: *When did we last critique and amend our thinking, our practice or our experience having studied God's Word.*

## **2. God chooses to rule his people through the Bible**

Or to put it another way: *saving faith is responding to the words of God. You can only have a relationship with God through the Bible.*

We can see that from Jesus' words in Mark 7 (see above). True worship is responding to the commands of God. Failing to respond to the written words of God (which, for the Pharisees, meant the Old Testament) was the very definition of sin and of un-repentance. Jesus says it is the sign of a heart that is "far from me" (Mark 7:6).

- **Relating to God through his Word**

This is the same all the way through the Bible. Saving faith is always a responding to the words of God. Saving faith is always allowing the voice of God to rule over you. It is a "wordy" encounter (which is not always how we think of "faith"). Here are just a few examples:

In *the Garden of Eden* (Genesis 1 and 2) God speaks to Adam and Eve – but will they listen to his voice? And in the Fall (Genesis 3) the very essence of sin is revealed to be a questioning of the words of God.

In *the Ten Commandments* (which, incidentally, are in the Hebrew original called the ten "words") the worship of God by means of images is forbidden (Exodus 20:1-4). Why no idols, pictures, statues or images? Because God has determined to reveal himself by words. That's the basis for our relationship with him. He speaks. We listen. That's the shape of acceptable worship.

And in the New Testament we see that to relate rightly to Jesus you must respond rightly to his word. In fact, saving faith comes from hearing the word of God. For example:

<sup>ESV</sup> Mark 8:38, For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

<sup>ESV</sup> John 12:47-48, If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. <sup>48</sup> The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.

<sup>ESV</sup> John 14:15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

<sup>ESV</sup> John 14:23-24, Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. <sup>24</sup> Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

<sup>ESV</sup> Romans 10:13-18, For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." <sup>14</sup> But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? <sup>15</sup> And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" <sup>16</sup> But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" <sup>17</sup> So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. <sup>18</sup> But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."

<sup>ESV</sup> 1 John 2:3, And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. <sup>4</sup> Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,



- **Objection: bibliolatry?**

Not everyone agrees (or likes the idea) that God rules his people through his word. Here's the first of two common objections that we must consider.

Sometimes it is said that *evangelical Christians are "bibliolaters."* The accusation is that we worship a book and not God. (A connected contention holds that *Jesus* alone is the word of God and that the gospel is about having a relationship with him, not a book. This is what Karl Barth claimed). How do we respond?

We can only know Jesus the Word of God by responding to the Words of God in Scripture. There is no other way of having a relationship with Jesus. That's how God intended it to be.

Nor is it the case that a "personal relationship" is undermined by "words"; we know from human experience that a personal relationship relies on words.

Also, it's worth noting that the Bible writers don't seem afraid of the accusation of bibliolatry! They say things like "I lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love" (Psalm 119:48). They treat the word of God as they would treat God himself. This is unsurprising, since Scripture is the way in which God makes himself know to us. God and his word are almost inseparable.

- **Objection: led by the Spirit, not the Word?**

Sometimes it is said that *Christians ought to be led by the Spirit, not by the Word.* The Bible and the Spirit are very commonly divided. For example, some churches are said to be "word churches" (usually conservative evangelicals, who are into preaching) and others to be "spirit churches" (usually Pentecostals or charismatics, who emphasise personal experiences of the Spirit in a believer's life). How do we respond?

The key point is this: you cannot separate Word and Spirit. You cannot have the Word without the Spirit. You cannot be filled by one without being filled by the other. After all, the Bible is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). The connection between word and Spirit can be seen in various places in Scripture.

In Genesis 1:1-3 the *work of creation* shows this connection. The Spirit hovers, and the creating word is spoken; in the creation account they are inseparable. When Psalm 104:30 reflects on this it attributes creation to the Holy Spirit.

Further, Jesus himself testifies to this connection *in his own life and ministry.* John 6:63 is a critical and extraordinary verse in this context:

<sup>ESV</sup> John 6:63, It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

Jesus says of his own words that they "are" Spirit. So closely connected are God the Son and God the Holy Spirit that, when the Son speaks he brings the Spirit (and therefore "life") to any who will hear and believe.

More generally we notice that *the Spirit empowers people to proclaim God's words.* This is true of Jesus, of the Bible writers themselves, and of all those commissioned by God:

<sup>ESV</sup> John 3:34, For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.

<sup>ESV</sup> Isaiah 61:1, The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

<sup>ESV</sup> 2 Peter 1:21, For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>ESV</sup> Numbers 11:25, Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it.

Specifically, it is the Holy Spirit's plan and pleasure to witness to Jesus and to empower the proclamation of Christ throughout the church-age. Simply, when someone is filled with the Spirit they are moved to speak of Jesus. For example:

<sup>ESV</sup> Acts 4:31, And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.<sup>6</sup>

Thus the Spirit's chief task now in the application of redemption is opening up our minds to receive God's truth in the Bible. His work now is not "inspiring" Scripture but "illuminating" Scripture to our sin-darkened minds.

### **3. Implication: are we excited about the Bible?**

All of us long to see God and to have an immediate experience of him. That's a right longing, and we're assured that one day all God's people will see his Son face to face.

But for now we relate to God by his Holy Spirit and through His words. It is not a face-to-face or immediate connection. This is one of the deep frustrations of life this side of glory. But it is what the Lord has called us to – living by faith and not by sight, sustained by every word that comes from His mouth in Scripture.

We are warned, too, that "non-verbal" spiritual encounters are often unhelpful or false. "Images" and idols diminish the true God or direct us to another god altogether. Signs and miracles were given chiefly to authenticate the apostles' words (2 Corinthians 12:11-12), shouldn't be the basis of saving faith and indeed can be opposed to it (e.g. Mark 8:12). Highly "visual" Christian meetings (e.g. video presentations, drama, or even dominant human personalities) detract from the centrality of the word.

We are warned, above all, that to set ourselves against the Bible is to disagree with Christ. It's an issue of the deepest disobedience. We need to let God speak to us – and we are called to listen, non-selectively and honesty to what it is that he is saying.

But, positively, are we excited about Bible? He has spoken... perfectly... authoritatively... to me. This is where knowledge of God lies. Will I listen?

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<sup>6</sup> This is the constant pattern in Acts. See 1:8, 2:4, 2:22-40, 4:8, 4:31, 7:55, 11:22-24, 13:9-10, 13:49-52, 28:30-31. As Revelation 19:10 puts it, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."