

SERIES: This We Believe  
SERMON: **I Believe in the Bible**  
SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 4:12-13  
SPEAKER: Michael P. Andrus  
DATE: April 13, 2008

What is the most heinous sin a human being can commit? Is it brutal, premeditated murder? Is it the abuse of an innocent child? Is it gross sexual perversion, a la Jeffrey Dahmer? Is it the annihilation of an entire race, as Hitler attempted to do? What is the worst sin a human being can commit?

Well, I think we can answer that question if we first ask and answer another one: What is the only sin that will send a person to Hell, the only sin God refuses to pardon? A careful study of the Scriptures reveals the answer to be: “the sin of unbelief in the face of clear evidence.” That is the conclusion we came to a few months ago when we studied the unpardonable sin in Matt. 12.

Furthermore, as Jesus made clear in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, it’s impossible to provide sufficient evidence for the person who does not want to believe. Jesus said about the skeptics of His own day, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced *even if* someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:31). And their reaction to His own resurrection a short time later proved His point. I suggest to you that the most heinous sin a human being can commit is to stiff-arm God, rejecting His plan of salvation as revealed in the Bible.

Listen to these words from the second chapter of Hebrews, verses 1-4:

*We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders, and various miracles.*

The point here is really pretty simple. In OT times God spoke through angels and prophets, revealing His law and demanding obedience. In the NT He has spoken again, this time revealing the Gospel through Jesus and the apostles, and once again demanding obedience. If God punished those who violated His *law*, what should we expect if we reject His *Gospel*? In chapter 3 and again in chapter 4 of Hebrews the warning is given at least five times, “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”

This morning I wish to address the issue of the authority of God's voice, His Word, the Bible, in the second message in a two-month series entitled *This We Believe*. Here is article #2 of our proposed new Statement of Faith:

*The Human Condition*

*We believe that God created Adam and Eve in His image, but they sinned when tempted by Satan. In union with Adam, human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from*

*God, and under His wrath. Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed.*

Our key verse for this message is Hebrews 4:12-13: *“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”*

### **The Bible is God's revelation to us.**

The Bible is like no other book. Other books are human in origin; this one is human and divine. While written by human beings, it contains a message from Almighty God that He wants every person to hear. God has actually revealed Himself to us in two primary ways—through general revelation and special revelation.

**He has provided general revelation in both nature and conscience.** Every human being can see the fingerprints of God in His creation, *if* he is willing to look for them. We saw that last Sunday in Psalm 19, which speaks so clearly of how nature reveals God, but I want you to look at another passage which teaches the same truth but then draws some stark implications, Romans 1:18ff:

*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.*

*For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.*

This passage indicates that the existence of the God of the Bible is plain and obvious in nature. But if that is true, why are there so many unbelievers, to say nothing of atheists and agnostics? Why do so many of our leading scientists leave God completely out of the equation when discussing the origin of the universe? Paul implies that their minds have been tampered with by sin. He indicates that their problem with God is not really intellectual but moral; that is, they want autonomy and refuse to acknowledge God's authority over them.

Not only is God revealed in nature, however; He is also revealed in the human conscience. In the second chapter of Romans Paul is dealing with the question, “How can God hold everyone accountable for obeying His law when not everyone has the law?” Even today, despite the great work of Wycliffe Bible Translators, there are millions of people who have never seen a Bible. Here's his answer in Rom. 2:12: “All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin *under the law* will be judged *by the law*.” In other words, God will not hold

people accountable for what they have not known.

However, one verse later he makes an astounding claim—that everyone knows the basic moral law of God because it has been written on his heart and conscience:

*Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.” (Romans 2:14-15)*

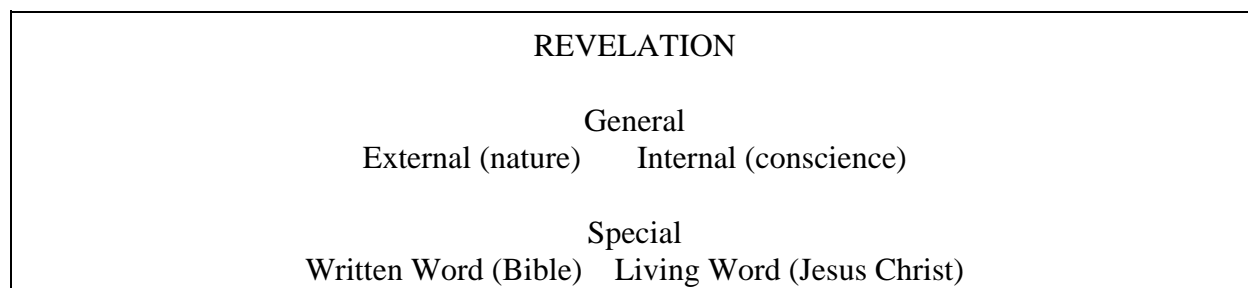
May I reread that in Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase, as I think he captures its meaning well in language that is easier for us to grasp:

*When outsiders who have never heard of God’s law follow it more or less by instinct, they confirm its truth by their obedience. They show that God’s law is not something alien, imposed on us from without, but woven into the very fabric of our creation. There is something deep within them that echoes God’s yes and no, right and wrong.*

Paul is asserting that everyone knows instinctively or innately that it is wrong to steal, lie, murder, and covet. Of course, a person can sear his conscience to the point that disobedience no longer bothers him, but that only confirms that those who refuse to accept the revelation God has given of Himself in nature and conscience have been tampered with by sin.

This general revelation, according to Rom. 1:20, renders mankind without excuse in the day of Judgment. But while general revelation is enough to condemn us, it is not enough to save us. It was designed as a signpost, a pointer to cause people to seek God. And when they do, God is waiting with Special Revelation—revelation which enables a person to understand exactly who God is and how to become part of His family. This special revelation also comes in two forms—the Living Word and the Written Word, Jesus Christ and the Bible.

He has also provided special revelation in both the Living Word and the Written Word. Here is a chart which visualizes these two major kinds of revelation:



If in nature God’s revelation is visualized, and in conscience it is internalized, in Scripture it is verbalized, and in Christ it is personified, for He is “the Word made flesh.” There is an amazing parallel between these two Words of God—the written and the living. This chart may be a little difficult to read, but it gives more than twenty common characteristics between Jesus and the Bible.

## THE WORDS OF GOD

Written Word	Characteristics	Living Word
2 Tim. 3:16	Divine origin	John 1:1
Heb. 1:1	Human nature	Heb. 2:14
Rom. 3:2	Jewish mediation	Heb. 7:14
Psalms 119:138	Faithful	Rev. 19:11
John 17:17	True	John 14:6
John 10:35	Without error	Heb. 4:15
Matt. 5:18	Imperishable	Heb. 1:8
1 Peter 1:24ff	Unchangeable	Heb. 13:8
Rom. 1:16	Power of God	1 Cor. 1:24
2 Peter 1:4	Precious	1 Peter 2:7
Heb. 4:12	Sharp Sword	Rev. 19:15
Psalms 119:105	Light	John 8:12
Luke 4:4	Bread	John 6:51
Psalms 119:129	Wonderful	Isa. 9:6
1 Cor. 15:2	Saves	Heb. 7:25
1 Tim. 4:5	Sanctifies	1 Cor. 1:2
1 Peter 1:22	Purifies	Titus 2:14
Psalms 119:9	Cleanses	1 John 1:7
Psalms 107:20	Heals	Matt. 4:24
1 Peter 2:2	Nourishes	John 6:58
John 8:32	Liberates	Gal. 5:1
Psalms 119:50	Makes alive	John 5:21
1 Peter 1:23	Produces children	1 Peter 1:3
Matt. 5:18	Lives forever	Rev. 1:18

Does the Bible claim to be revelation from God? Well, over 7,000 times the individual authors of the Bible use the phrase, "This is what the Lord says." On rare occasion they give a personal

opinion; on a few occasions they share historical research they have done. But the vast majority of the time they unashamedly claim that what they write is God's revelation to mankind. In a few moments I am going to share some of the evidence that backs up this claim and causes me to accept it at face value.

But first allow me to observe that while it's important to know that God revealed Himself through the human authors of the Bible, it is equally important to know whether they recorded that revelation accurately. In other words, God may have spoken truth to Moses and David and Paul, but if I don't know that they wrote it down accurately, it doesn't help me much. That brings us to our second major point:

**The Bible is “inspired” as no other book is, and therefore, it is without error.**

We tend to use the term “inspired” rather loosely to refer to something that lifts our spirits and makes us feel good all over. I've even had people tell me once in a while that *I* was “inspired” on a particular Sunday. Now when I was told that, I didn't stop and offer a lecture on the doctrine of inspiration—I just said “thank you.” But frankly, inspiration means something very different when applied to the Bible. It is a technical term to describe the Holy Spirit's ministry in the recording of God's revelation in the Bible. Here is a good working definition: *Inspiration is the work of the Holy Spirit superintending the human authors of the Bible so that using their own individual personalities they composed and recorded without error God's revelation in the words of the original manuscripts of the Bible.*

This definition tells us that the Bible is a unique book in that it is both human and divine. It was written by ordinary human beings, but the Holy Spirit performed a miracle by enabling those human beings to do something that has never been done before or since, namely write a book about the great eternal issues of creation, sin, salvation, immortality, and eternity without misleading anyone about anything. In other words, God is both the source of the content of Scripture (revelation) and its chief editor (inspiration).

As astounding as the claims of divine revelation and inspiration are, there is plenty of confirmatory evidence.

**The internal evidence is explicit.** This is exactly what the Bible claims for itself in 2 Tim. 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21 and other passages. We do not have time this morning for any detailed analysis of these passages, but I do want to read them, and I will put an addendum on the website that will explain them in detail. 2 Tim. 3:16 says, “All Scripture is God-breathed (inspired in the KJV) and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” And 2 Peter 1:21 adds, “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1</sup>

**The external evidence is confirmatory.**

**1. The Bible's amazing unity.** Despite having 40 authors, who wrote over a period of 2,000 years and from different races, languages, cultures and perspectives, the Bible is a single book

with a unity that is astounding.

**2. Its unparalleled historical accuracy.** Nelson Gluek and William F. Albright are probably the two most famous archaeologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Neither was a confessing Christian, yet both of them said essentially the same thing—that they had never discovered an archeological fact that contradicted a biblical affirmation.

**3. Its unique record of fulfilled prophecy.** Josh McDowell in *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, lists literally hundreds of prophecies that are fulfilled in Scripture.

**4. Its survivability in the face of unprecedented opposition.** Over 2 billion Bibles have been printed despite periodic efforts to burn it, ban it, and persecute those who possess it.

**5. Its high moral and ethical teaching.** Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer once said, “The Bible is not a book man could write if he would or would write if he could.” Strangely, today the Bible is actually being criticized for its moral and ethical teaching (on the topic of homosexuality, for example), but I don't think that says as much about the Bible as it does about the direction our culture is heading.

There are those, interestingly, who accept the inspiration of Scripture but balk at affirming its inerrancy, i.e. the view that it is completely without error. I think that's theologically inconsistent, yet while some recognize the Bible as a unique book, they want to leave themselves a little breathing room in regard to potential historical or scientific errors in the Bible. Others don't want to be automatically locked into viewpoints taught in the Bible but which viewed as unacceptable by our postmodern culture. Examples of this may be Jesus' very restrictive teaching on divorce and remarriage, Paul's view of the role of women in the home and church, or the biblical view of homosexuality.

I have a confession to make: I am one of those old-fashioned preachers who believes with all my heart that the Bible is free from error, not just doctrinally, but also historically and scientifically. That doesn't mean it speaks with technical accuracy. Actually it is much more likely to speak in phenomenological language, or the language of appearance. It speaks of the sunrise, for example, though we all know the sun doesn't rise; rather the earth revolves on its axis. But the *Wichita Eagle* also spoke of sunrise this morning.

I have been studying the Bible full-time now for about 46 years (starting in my first year of Bible College), and I have greater confidence in the Scriptures than when I started. There are some things I don't understand, and there are some textual and translational problems. But where the Bible speaks clearly, the issue is settled for me.

When history is brought to a great consummation, I believe those who have staked their lives on God's Word will be on the winning side. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18). That was His way of saying, “You can take God's Word to the bank.”

## The Bible is trustworthy as an original source document.

**The complaints of the skeptics.** There are those who scoff at the doctrines of Revelation, Inspiration, and Inerrancy. Some of the more liberal skeptics allege that the NT was actually written down long after the events it describes, and that it was written by anonymous authors who attached the names of prophets and apostles to their writings in order to get them accepted. Further they allege that over the years the biblical stories were embellished by well-meaning fanatics, and the eventual product was religious myth with very little resemblance to historical fact.

So, they suggest that we just honor the Bible as a valuable book on the order of Aesop's fables, worthy to be consulted for its insight into the human condition, but certainly not to be accepted as any kind of absolute standard. This is, in essence, the choice of liberal scholars like those in the Jesus Seminar, who voted on which quotations of Jesus in the NT are genuine and which were merely attributed to Him by the early church. Their consensus was that 82% of the words of Jesus are bogus. If they voted on His miracles I can guarantee you that 100% would be rejected, because these so-called scholars come to the Bible with an obvious anti-supernatural bias.

There are other skeptics who simply argue that the doctrines of Revelation, Inspiration, and Inerrancy are irrelevant since the Bible we have today is so far removed from the original. Even if God did reveal Himself to the prophets and the apostles, and even if the Holy Spirit did keep the human authors from error as they recorded God's revelation, we're still up a creek without a paddle since we don't possess any of the original manuscripts of the OT or NT. And since books had to be hand-copied prior to the invention of the printing press in 1454, there was plenty of time and opportunity for errors to creep into the text. Those are the complaints.

**What are the facts?** It is true that we do not have the original copies of any of the books of the OT or NT. It is also true that every handwritten copy archaeologists have found differs from every other at some point. But that isn't as serious a problem as it might first appear. There is a science known as "textual criticism," which involves the study of ancient manuscript copies with the goal of ascertaining the original text. By the way, textual criticism needs to be done on all ancient literature, from Plato's Republic to Homer's Iliad to Caesar's Gallic Wars, because we don't have the originals of any ancient writings. Let me show you a chart that reveals the sources textual critics have available for the major works of famous ancient authors.

### TEXTUAL EVIDENCE FOR ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS

Author	Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	Copies
Caesar	44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1000 yrs.	10
Plato	347 B.C.	A.D. 900	1200 yrs.	7
Tacitus	A.D. 100	A.D. 1100	1000 yrs.	20

Pliny	A.D. 113	A.D. 850	750 yrs.	7
Thucydides	400 B.C.	A.D. 900	1300 yrs.	8
Suetonius	A.D. 160	A.D. 950	800 yrs.	8
Herodotus	425 B.C.	A.D. 900	1300 yrs.	8
Sophocles	406 B.C.	A.D. 1000	1400 yrs.	100
Lucretius	53 B.C.	A.D. 1050	1100 yrs.	2
Catullus	54 B.C.	A.D. 1550	1600 yrs.	3
Euripedes	406 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1500 yrs.	9
Demosthenes	322 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1300 yrs.	200
Aristotle	322 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1400 yrs.	5
Aristophanes	385 B.C.	A.D. 900	1200 yrs.	10

Source: "Manuscript Authorities for the Text of the Chief Classical Writers," by F.W. Hall in his Companion to Classical Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), pp. 199ff.

Now in contrast there are thousands of manuscript copies of the NT, and some are dated far closer to the original than is true for any of these other works. The more copies available, of course, the easier it is to determine which readings are correct through the application of carefully devised rules for studying textual variants. The amazing thing to me is that when a classics professor or philosopher is lecturing on Plato you will never hear him say to his class, "There's no point in studying this too seriously because we don't know what Plato really wrote," yet religion professors will often stand up and say that about the Bible, when the fact is that the Bible is a hundred times more trustworthy as an original source document than is Plato's *Republic*.

Furthermore, the copies of the Bible which *have* been discovered are of a far superior quality than the copies of other ancient writings. Here's why: those who copied the Scriptures generally believed they were copying the very words of God, so they took extraordinary pains to do their job well. The Massorettes were a kind of union of Jewish scribes who controlled the copying of sacred Scripture. A scribe would copy a book of the OT, for example, but before he was paid for his work, it had to be checked by the Massorettes. They would count every letter in the manuscript, and if a single letter was found to be out of place, they considered it a flawed copy and would bury it in a scroll coffin (they couldn't burn it because it was sacred), and months of work by that scribe went for nothing.

How well did the scribes do their work? When the Dead Sea Scrolls yielded copies of OT books more than 1,000 years older than the oldest previous manuscript copy, it was discovered that the texts were almost identical, and the few words that were different did not concern any important truth. That's really amazing. In fact, I think it can only be explained as God's providential protection over His Word.

As to the other complaint of the skeptics, they are simply wrong when they assert that the NT was written a century or two *after* the time of Christ. We know with virtual certainty, and even most liberal scholars now agree, that all of the NT books were written within 50-60 years after the death of Christ while eyewitnesses were still around to confirm or deny. We also know that the entire OT predates the Christian era by at least 200 years (probably closer to 400), because all but one of the OT books (Ruth) was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which everyone agrees were written in the 2nd century before Christ.

Let me illustrate what this means by reference to the book of Isaiah. Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls liberal scholars almost universally held that Isaiah was written not by the Prophet Isaiah 600 years before Christ, but by 2 or 3 later authors. In fact, they claimed that the portions clearly prophetic of Christ, like Isaiah 7:14, 9:6, and chapter 53, were written by early Christians after the time of Christ. That's why their predictions were so accurate—they were writing *history* but pretending it was *prophecy*.

But then a little bedouin boy in 1948 was playing in a cave in the Judean desert and discovered some clay pots. In those pots were manuscripts over 2,000 years old. Among those manuscripts was a copy of the entire book of Isaiah, dated by carbon 14 and many other dating methods at least 150 years before Christ! Now what do you think occurred? Do you think the skeptical scholars admitted their error, acknowledged the authority of Scripture, and bowed humbly before Christ? Don't hold your breath! No, instead, since they now had to admit that the entire book of Isaiah predated Christ, they went back to the passages they had earlier acknowledged were speaking of Christ and reinterpret them as referring to something else. For example, consider Isaiah 7:14: "A virgin shall conceive and bear a child." Critical scholars who were once willing to admit that this verse referred to Christ but written *after* Christ, now decided it had nothing to do with Christ and should be translated, "A young woman shall conceive."

Friends, the Bible is trustworthy as an original source document. People who reject it as such are speaking out of ignorance or prejudice or both.

Quickly I move on to our last main point this morning:

### **The Bible is authoritative for faith and practice.**

This follows logically from what we have already seen. *If* the Bible is revelation from God, and *if* it is inspired by the Holy Spirit and thus without error, *then* it must be authoritative for our lives. This is critical, for there is no other adequate source of authority.

**There is no other adequate source of authority.** Oh, other sources have been offered. Some claim that human reason is our authority, but we all know the result of such an approach: everyone does what is right in his own eyes. Human reason is appealed to by intellectuals in our day to justify making it a crime to harm turtle eggs while making it perfectly legal to kill unborn children! There has never been and there will never be a consensus on what is right and wrong so long as human reason is the standard.

Others consider church dogma to be authoritative: whatever the church says is true is true. But which

church? They all disagree—that's why we have so many denominations. And even if you choose one particular church, do you agree with what that church said in 1900 or 1950 or 1990, because chances are it will say different things at different times. Church dogma is not a very reliable source.

Still others accept tradition as authoritative: i.e., whatever people have believed down through the centuries is true. But we all know that a great many people can believe a lie for a long period of time.

All three of these sources of authority fall short of commanding total obedience from men, although all may have a supplemental place. The only absolutely reliable source of authority is the Word of God. At least that's what Jesus claimed.

**Jesus claimed divine authority for the Bible.** Think with me for a moment about the logic of this. It makes no sense for anyone to claim to be a Christian if he is not loyal to Christ, for the very word Christian means a follower of Christ. It also makes no sense to claim to be a Christian but reject the teachings of Jesus. There are many who do this, but to me it makes no sense. They ought to call themselves something else—semi-Christians or pseudo-Christians.

Now if you agree with me that Christians should be loyal to the teachings of Jesus, then the only thing I need to show you is that Jesus did indeed claim absolute authority for the Bible. Then our allegiance to Him requires that we accept it also.

**1. He submitted to the authority of the Bible in His own conduct.** Remember our study last year of the temptation of Christ, as recorded in Matt. 4? Three times Satan came to Jesus and tempted Him. Three times Jesus fended off the temptation by appealing to the written Word of God.<sup>2</sup> I don't believe Jesus was hurling Bible verses at the Devil, for what good would that do? Rather He was quoting these verses to Himself, placing Himself under the absolute authority of God's Word.

**2. Jesus submitted to the authority of the Bible in His controversies.** Listen to Jesus in Matt. 22:29, where He is responding to an attempt by the Sadducees to trip Him up with a nonsense question of the variety, "Where did Cain get his wife?" Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God." The clear implication is that the Scriptures are authoritative for controversial issues, and ignorance of them produces error automatically. Where do *we* go to settle controversies? To court? To our friends? To our ability to debate and argue? Or do we go to the Bible?

**3. Jesus claimed the Bible's authority over His ministry.** In Matt. 26:51-54 we have the story of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. When the soldiers came to arrest Him, you will recall, Peter pulled out a sword and lopped off the ear of the high priest's servant in a vain attempt to protect Jesus. But listen to Jesus' words: "Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in *this* way?" Jesus was so committed to the authority of Scripture that He was willing to be arrested, tried, and executed to fulfill what the Scriptures predicted.

Friends, I want to say with all the conviction I can muster:

**Those who accept the Bible's authority find their experience vindicates its teaching.** I am convinced that the single greatest liability in society today is ignorance of God's Word (along with a refusal to accept its authority). In fact, it's the single greatest liability even in the church. There are tens of thousands of churches which don't even believe in the authority of Scripture. Of those who do, many pay only lip service to it. Yet to those who believe it and accept it, it is self-vindicating.

I have sat with many people in their final hours and have yet to hear one say, "I wasted too much time in Bible study and spiritual pursuits—I wish I had given myself more to pleasure or work or hobbies." I have heard many say the opposite. The only things I regret in my own life are the times when I was disobedient to God's Word.

### **Principles to Ponder:**

**1. We must know the Bible, for we can't submit to its authority if we don't know what it says.** The reason why the vast majority of our preaching here at First Free is directly out of the Bible is because of our conviction that it's better to hear God speak than hear some pastor's opinion.

**2. We must allow the Bible to interpret our traditions and experiences, not the other way around.** That could be an entire sermon itself, but it can't be today.

**3. We must remember that the Bible is a vehicle to Christ, not an end in itself.**<sup>3</sup> There are people who can name the books of the Bible, give you the history of the Jewish people, list the kings of Judah and Israel along with a mass of background material, and do word studies that will amaze you, but they seem to forget that the Bible, while it is a unique and wonderful book, is not an end in itself. Its purpose is to reveal Christ to the seeking heart and mind. We don't worship the Written Word; we worship the Living Word.

Allow me to close with the reading of a verse from a book penned while its author was in prison awaiting execution. Paul writes from that Roman prison: "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained" (2 Tim. 2:8,9). In fact, it can set you free if you will study it, believe it, and live by it.

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1. There are two NT passages which shed great light on the topic of inspiration. The first is 2 Peter 1:20,21. In this passage, written about 30 years after Jesus' death, Peter is facing his own imminent death, and he is concerned lest some converts abandon the truths he has taught them down through the years. He assures his readers that he and the other apostles did not follow cleverly devised tales when they proclaimed the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, but rather were eyewitnesses of His glory and majesty. But then Peter turns to something even more solid and sure than eyewitness accounts—and that is the written word of God. Here is what he says, beginning in verse 20: "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

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The first item we need to clarify here is that the term "prophecy" does not always refer to predicting the future. Sometimes it does refer to foretelling, but more often it refers merely to *forthtelling*. A prophecy is simply a Scriptural declaration or revelation. In other words, we could translate verse 21, "No Scriptural revelation resulted from a prophet's own private interpretation of events or doctrine or prophecy. In fact, biblical revelation never had its origin in the will of man at all; rather men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

What does it mean to be "carried along" by the Holy Spirit? The word used in the original Greek is a nautical term referring to the wind which carries along a ship. In fact, it is used this way in Acts 27:15 where Paul is caught in a terrible storm. It says, "the ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along." When the wind drives a ship, it doesn't affect the cargo; it doesn't change the character of the crew; it doesn't really even affect the ship itself except to provide direction and impetus.

In like manner, when the Holy Spirit "carried along" the prophets and apostles, He didn't change their IQ's, He didn't give them all identical vocabularies; He didn't make perfect men out of them. He just gave them direction so they could record God's revelation without error.

By the way, I believe there is an astounding parallel between the work of the Holy Spirit in the conception of the written Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit in the conception of the Living Word of God—Jesus. When the Virgin Mary was told by the angel Gabriel that she was to bear a child, he spoke these familiar words, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." That word "overshadow" is quite vague, much like the term "carried along" in 2 Peter 1:21. It tells us little about the actual process the Holy Spirit used in bringing about Mary's pregnancy. But we do know the result: a perfect human being, the Son of God.

So here is the parallel: the Holy Spirit miraculously enabled an ordinary human being, namely Mary, to produce a perfect child, namely the Living Word of God, Jesus Christ. By the same token, the Holy Spirit enabled ordinary human beings, namely the Apostles, to produce a perfect book, namely the Written Word of God, the Bible. In the one case He "overshadowed" the Virgin Mary; in the other case He "carried along" the human authors of Scripture. The former we refer to as "incarnation;" the latter we refer to as "inspiration."

Now there is one more key passage for the Spirit's work of inspiration, and it actually uses the word "inspired." I'm speaking of 2 Tim. 3:16: "All Scripture is God-breathed (the KJV reads "inspired by God") 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." The term "inspiration" would probably be better translated "outspiration," if there were such a word, for it really tells us that the Scriptures are breathed out by God. If that is true, and if God is perfect and holy, then I would argue that the Scriptures must also be perfect and holy.

2. In response to the first He quoted Deut. 8:3, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word

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that comes from the mouth of God.” In response to the second He quoted Deut. 6:16: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” And in response to the third He said, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

3. Donald Grey Barnhouse (Romans, Vol. 4, 88) used a powerful illustration that profoundly makes this point. While staying at a resort on the Atlantic ocean, he asks,

*Suppose that a young friend who lived in Iowa and who had never had the privilege of journeying to the coast should have asked us to write him about the ocean. What would you think if we wrote as follows:*

*“We have a beautiful room with a picture window that gives us a sweeping view of the ocean. The window is twelve feet two inches long and four feet eight inches high. It is divided into three sections. We have taken a scraping of the glass and have had it analyzed and can tell you the chemical formula of the glass. We have had an expert from one of the great glass companies tell us all about the glass and we are giving you herewith a history of the invention and development of glass. The glass is set in steel frames that are painted black. We have had the steel and the paint analyzed and you can read the analysis in our second and third studies affixed to this letter. We have discovered that the panes of glass are kept in the frames by a putty composition. We have scraped down some of this putty and are giving you a long addendum on its chemical composition. Finally, we have inquired of the hotel management and found out their method of keeping the windows clean. You will be delighted to know from the subjoined study the whole process of the window-cleaning and the formula of the special detergent needed to cope with the salt spray from the ocean. In closing, let us say that we hope you have enjoyed our study of the ocean.”*