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## REVELATION: GOD SPEAKS

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### Part 2 of Doctrine

Pastor Mark Driscoll | April 06, 2008

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Well, howdy, Mars Hill. Pastor Mark Driscoll, glad to be with you today, and we are continuing our sermon series called Doctrine. This is the second sermon in that series, and today I'll be looking at the issue of revelation, and the fact that the God of the Bible is a God who speaks. So I'll begin our time in prayer and we'll get right to work this day, as we have a tremendous amount of content to cover. And I'm going to ask you to do your best to follow along as I cover what probably should be a whole series of sermons.

Father God, we begin today by thanking you for being a God who speaks, a God who wants a relationship, who communicates to us so that we might know who you are. Lord Jesus, we thank you for coming to reveal to us the God who speaks to us as the God who speaks to us. And Holy Spirit, we thank you for inspiring the writing of Scripture, and illuminate our understanding of the Bible so that we might know who Jesus is and what he has done. God, as we do examine your Word today we do so in faith that you will speak to us individually and corporately. And God, it is our prayer that we would hear you, respond appropriately, as we ask this in Jesus' good name. Amen.

Well, I'll start by saying that we live in a world that is in many ways driven by this obsession with communication. From cell phones to e-mails to blogs to websites to text messages to physical hard-copy mail to verbal communication to television, radio, advertising, marketing – there are innumerable ways that people communicate and are communicated to. And the thirst for that kind of communication and relationship comes out of the fact that we are made in the image and likeness of God. It's an issue we'll address in a few weeks in greater detail in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. But it really begins with the fact that, as we studied in the first sermon in this series, that God is a Trinitarian community of Father, Son, and Spirit, and that God has within his own essence and nature communication. The Father, Son, and Spirit, though they are one God, they are also three Persons and they speak to one another.

And as a result of us being made in the image and likeness of God, we hear from God who speaks to us. We speak to God in prayer. We speak to one another. We build relationships around communication. All of this is connected to the big doctrine of revelation, the fact that ours is a God who speaks. And so we'll start by answering a number of questions on the doctrine of revelation. The first is what is revelation?

Well, revelation is, by definition, God's means by which he has chosen to reveal himself, to speak to us. One of the first things, for example, we see in the opening pages of Genesis is in Genesis 1 we read no less than ten times, "God said." That the God of the Bible is a God who speaks, and he continues to be a God who speaks. And so the reason we need revelation is that God is Creator, we are created. The distance between us and God is great, and unless God practiced self-disclosure, speaking to us, revealing to us who he is and what he's done through Jesus Christ, we would not know. We would be left with speculation.

And speculation is the human effort to guess what God is like or what God wants us to believe or how God wants us to behave. Speculation would include philosophy and spirituality and religion, as well as various forms of social science – not all of which is necessarily bad or evil, but it is all under the rubric of speculation, human efforts to make a ventured guess as to who God is and what he's like.

Well, revelation is far more reliable and helpful than speculation because revelation isn't us guessing, it's God speaking. And with God speaking he tells us who he is. He tells us what he desires. He tells us how to have a relationship with him. He speaks to us and then invites us in prayer to also speak to him.

Now, in the Bible speaks of two broad and general categories of revelation. The first is general revelation, the second is special revelation. General revelation is general in that it is available to all people in all times and all places, all cultures, all circumstances. And it is general in that, though it does reveal a great deal about God, it doesn't give us the specific name of God, like Jesus Christ. Or it doesn't tell us specifically what God has done, for example, dying in our place for our sins.

There are at least three places that the Bible speaks of general revelation. The first category would be creation. Romans 1 says it this way: "What can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and his divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made." Goes on to say, "So they are without excuse." Romans 1, other texts like Psalm 19 echo this same belief, that general revelation includes creation, that God is Creator and creation gives us much understanding about the character of God.

The intelligent design argument, which we will investigate forthcoming in this series as well, says that because the world is put together in an orderly and intelligent way it reveals something of the intelligence of the designer, being God. Furthermore, creation reveals to us that God must be powerful if he not only created but rules over creation. God must be beautiful because creation reflects something of his glory.

And I was thinking about it personally, that when we get sick – I’m struggling with a head cold a bit myself. When we get sick God’s character is revealed in that our bodies have the ability to even heal themselves. The psalmist says, for example, that our bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made. That in looking at all of the attention to detail that has gone into the formation of our body and its systems, we see something of the loving care of God. Just the complexity of the ear to hear, the eye to see, the mind to think, the hands to touch – all of which is a revelation, generally speaking, that a good God made us for pleasure and life and joy and experience. And when we get sick, the fact that our bodies heal themselves indicates to us that God is a loving and merciful and gracious God, that he’s even concerned about our health and our well-being, all of which fits under the rubric of general revelation regarding creation.

Another way that we see God revealing himself in the category of general revelation is under the auspices of something we’ll call providence, and that is that God not only made the world, that God continues to rule over it. Unlike deism which says that God is removed from creation and is no longer involved, Christianity says that God is both sovereign over creation and he is at work in creation through providence.

One example would be Acts 14:17 where we read that God “did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” That God’s providential love, that God’s providential care and provision reveal to us something of the goodness of God. The fact that there are seasons reveals something of the love and goodness and provision of God. The fact that water falls from the sky to enable us to grow crops, to feed ourselves and to continue our life on the earth are all ways that, through providence, his continued, ongoing loving provision and oversight of the world he has made, it is revelatory of the goodness of God. And so general revelation includes not only God creating the world, but also God providentially ruling over the world that he has made.

And lastly, through the conscience that God has implanted to every person that he has made in his image and likeness. Whereas creation is an external witness that in some general ways reveals to us God, so also our conscience is an internal witness that likewise reveals to us something of the goodness and the holiness and the justice of God.

Paul says it this way, regarding the conscience, in Romans 2:14-15. “When Gentiles” – speaking there of non-Christians – “who do not have the law” – meaning they did not have a full understanding of the Bible and they had not access to the books of the Bible as we do – “by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience” – there’s our word – “also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse, or even excusing them.”

What Paul is saying is that every human being, whether or not they are a Christian, does experience general revelation through the inward conviction of their conscience. Anyone who has ever not done something because they just innately knew it was wrong. Anyone who has done something that they knew was wrong and then felt badly about it. Anyone who has ever apologized for something they have done. Or anyone who has ever appealed to a greater moral standard, saying something to the example of, “That’s not right. You shouldn’t do that. That was wrong. That’s unacceptable,” all of which is appealing to conscience, the inward belief that certain things are right and certain things are wrong, and that God has made us in his image and likeness with a sense of justice and a sense of rightness.”

That’s why even non-Christians will appeal to conscience. They’ll appeal to some universal law. You shouldn’t take advantage of those who are poor. You shouldn’t be one who rapes or murders or steals or kills. And the question is, “Well, why?” Well, it’s because of conscience. Because God made us, even though we’re sinful and fallen and corrupt, something in us knows that certain things are right and certain things are wrong. And we tend to appeal to those, particularly when we’ve been sinned against.

Those are three means by which the Bible speaks of revelation in a general sense. General revelation is seen in creation, where creation, because it is made by God, reflects something of the goodness of God. It includes providence, God’s ongoing rule and reign over that which he has made, as well as the inward conscience that he has implanted in our very being, knowing that there is a distinction between right and wrong, good and evil. That is categorically general revelation. It’s available to all people.

And in addition to that some people receive what theologians will also call special revelation, special meaning that the information about God is clearer in special revelation than it is in general revelation. Secondly, that in special revelation it is to a smaller number of people than general revelation. General revelation is available to all people. Special revelation goes to an individual, a group, or a certain limited number of people.

I’ll give you three examples of special revelation. The first is supernatural occurrences – the miraculous. For example, surrounding the birth of Jesus his father Joseph had a prophetic dream. That’s a very special form of revelation, that God would speak to Joseph, telling him not to divorce Mary, Jesus’ mother, because she had been a faithful woman and she was conceiving the Lord Jesus by a miracle. That’s a very special revelation, supernaturally given through a dream from God to Joseph. Another example would be Mary herself surrounding the time of the birth of Jesus. An angel – the angel Gabriel, the Bible records – came to her and told her that she would become pregnant by a miracle of God, the Holy Spirit.

All right, that would be a series of events that were supernatural special revelation, where Joseph receives a dream and Mary receives information from an angel. That’s very unusual. It’s very special revelation but God can and does work in those kinds of supernatural ways. For example, in my own life I occasionally receive prophetic dreams where God tells me about people and circumstances in the future that ultimately come to pass just like God said. Occasionally – just a few occasions – I’ve had God audibly speak to me. As far as I know, I have never been visited by an angel but I do, and we do,

believe in these kinds of supernatural, miraculous ways that God specially reveals himself to his people as needed.

Another example of special revelation – second category – is Jesus. Jesus Christ is God the Son. He's eternally God and he came into human history. The Bible says in John 1 that he is "the Word of God," so God speaks to us through the person and the work and the life and the ministry and the preaching and the teaching of Jesus. Hebrews 1 says that in previous times God would speak to us through mediaries, such as prophets and angels, but he has chosen to speak to us most clearly through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. That Jesus was special, is special revelation. That God is fully revealed clearly in Jesus – that's where Colossians says that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. That God is invisible in Spirit, but in Jesus God revealed himself by entering into human history humbly as the man Jesus Christ.

And then thirdly 2 Timothy 3:16 says that all Scripture is breathed out by God, that special revelation includes the miraculous, Jesus, and the Bible, which records the life of Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed, that God literally worked through the human authors to articulate, to speak to us. And so that being said, special revelation really is about ultimately the teaching of the Scriptures.

Which brings us to the next question, and that is, "What are the Scriptures?" Well, when we speak of the Scriptures, the word Scripture means "writing," and so we're talking about written documents. The Bible means "book," and so the Bible itself is a collection of sacred writings. When we say Holy Bible, what we are talking about is the book filled with those books that God has divinely inspired. Again, all Scripture is breathed-out by God or inspired of God.

The Bible itself is a library of books. I can still remember being a non-Christian in college, going through and reading the Bible for myself. And at first I was confused because I started in Genesis and read through the Bible, but it didn't appear to be in chronological order like every other book I had read. Well, that's because the Bible is actually a collection of 66 books, and those books are not put together in historical order, but they're put together rather by genre of literature. So the law is together, the first five books of the Old Testament. The prophets are together. The poetic and wisdom literature and Psalms and such is together. The biographies of Jesus' life, the gospels, are together. The letters are together. And so it's like in some ways when you pick up the Bible you're picking up a small library. And like going to a library there are different classifications, different genres and types of literature. And that is how the Bible is put together.

If anyone is curious, as an aside, there are Bibles that are put together in chronological order, and you can read the Bible then from Genesis to Revelation in its chronological order in a chronological Bible. But generally speaking most Bibles are compiled by genre of literature.

The books of the Bible, the 66 books include 39 in the Old Testament, 27 in the New Testament. They're written over the course of about roughly 1,500 years by roughly 40 authors. We know most of the authors of the books of the Bible. A few there is not certainty. The books of the Bible as well are written primarily in three languages, Greek and Hebrew being the preponderance of writing, a few smaller bits in the language of Aramaic. They write from Africa. They write from Europe. They write from Asia, so it's a multicultural and global book in that regard.

As you pick up the Bible as well you may realize that there are chapters, so Romans chapter 1, Romans chapter 2, for example. There are actually 1,189 chapters in the Bible. Those were inserted in the 1200s by some scholars, and they did so for the same reason that your house and mine have numbers on them. They're addresses to help us find things. And so the chapter headings in the Bible are not divinely inspired; they were later additions to help us reference back to parts of the Bible that we'd want to study.

In the 1500s then the verses of the Bible were added. The content was already there, but breaking it down into verses, so now it's not just Romans 1 and 2, but it's Romans chapter 1, verse 2, Romans chapter 1, verse 4 and such. Those were added in the 1500s as well.

So today we have 31,173 verses in the Bible. We have 1,189 chapters. We have the primary divisions of the Old and New Testament, the Old leading up to Jesus, the New following the birth and life of Jesus. And when it comes to the issues of Old and New Testament, I think part of the problem is that word "Old." Some people don't spend a lot of time reading, studying the Old Testament by virtue of the fact that it simply says that it's old, and that seems to denote that it's outdated, archaic, and irrelevant.

The Bible itself doesn't use that language. The first person to speak of the Old and New Testaments was one of the early church fathers, Origen. He lived in the second and third century. And he went to Jeremiah 31 where it talks about the old and the new covenants, and then he applied that to the Bible, speaking of the Old and the New Testaments. It's not necessarily a bad thing, but it gives the unfortunate impression that the New Testament is better than the Old Testament, or that the New Testament is really important and the Old Testament is a bit outdated. That's not the truth. Jesus read, loved, studied the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is the Bible that Jesus used to grow in wisdom, stature, and favor with men and God, Luke 2 declares. And so it, too, is Scripture.

Now, in the Old Testament you have about three-fourths of the Bible, about 929 chapters – I've got it down here – 23,214 verses. The Old Testament was originally written on something called papyrus, which was paper that was beat out of reeds. Furthermore, the Old Testament is all foreshadowing the coming of Jesus, its prophecies and expectations and anticipations of the coming of Jesus.

Then in the New Testament we find that the remaining quarter of the Bible is in the New Testament, about 260 chapters, about 7,959 verses. The New Testament is written on parchments, which are prepared animal skins. And the New Testament is about the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and the connection between the Old and New Testament is continual.

I'll give you one example. It's almost impossible to pick up a New Testament book and just start reading without immediately hitting an idea, a concept, a phrase, a person that is in the Old Testament, because the Old Testament was foreshadowing and the New Testament is fulfillment.

That leads us to the next question, that I think is among the most important. What do the Scriptures say about themselves? If the Bible itself doesn't declare to be from God, holy, trustworthy, and good, then we shouldn't believe that about the Bible, either. I'll give you a few examples of what the Bible says about itself. The Bible says that nothing is to be added to it or taken from it. It says that in Deuteronomy. It also says that, for example, in Proverbs 30:5-6, where it says that "every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him." It goes on to then say in 30:6, "Do not add to his word, or he will rebuke you and prove you to be a liar." Right there, the Bible says, "Don't add anything to the Scriptures." There we're talking about what theologians will call the sufficiency of Scriptures.

Also we are told that the Bible is effective. In Isaiah 55:11, God says, "My word that I send forth will not return to me void. It will accomplish exactly what I intend for it to accomplish." So God's word is effective.

Also we are told in Psalm 19:7 that God's Word, the Scriptures, are perfect. It says that every word of God is perfect, that God's Word is perfect. And we are not perfect. Our world is not perfect. But God's Word is perfect.

It is also a guide for our life. In Psalm 119:105 – the whole chapter is one of the longest explanations of the perfection and helpfulness and truthfulness of Scripture, and it uses the analogy therein that the Scriptures are like a lamp that someone uses as they're on a walk, perhaps, in the middle of the night through the darkness of the woods unable to find their way. The Scriptures are a light unto our path, that they help to guide us in God's will and God's way, according to God's Word.

The Bible also claims to be true in John 17:17. That's Jesus' high priestly prayer, his longest prayer in the Bible. He prays this: "Father, sanctify them" – speaking of you and I – "sanctify them by the truth; your word" – or the Scriptures – "are truth." And so the Bible is true.

Additionally, the Scriptures are to be obeyed. James 1:22, Jesus' brother says, "Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

Also, we read that the Bible is all that we truly need to know God – again, the sufficiency of Scripture. There's a story told in Luke 16 where a man died and he didn't know the Lord or love the Lord, and he was suffering. And he said, "I want you, Lord Jesus, to return back and to tell my family that you are God so that they don't join me in this terrible place." And Jesus says, "They already have Moses. They have the law and the prophets." – "They already have the Bible. If they don't believe the Bible they won't believe me, either. The Bible is sufficient to know God."

Hebrews 4:12 says that the Word of God living and active, sharper than a double-edged sword, penetrating to the joints and marrows, and exposing the attitudes of our heart. That it is the word of God, the word of God. That literally means that the Bible is the way in which God speaks to us. There are many people who would love to hear from God, would love for God to communicate to them. And every time we open the Bible, God, in fact, does speak to us.

And lastly, in Acts 17:11 we see that the Scriptures are really the standard for all doctrine and teaching in the church, and that anything that we believe or anything that we examine is to be ultimately tested by Scripture. Therein it says, in Acts 17:11 that the Bereans, this group of Christians, were more noble than the Thessalonians and other bunch of Christians who had gathered together, Paul says. Because even though Paul taught as an author of Scripture, they took everything that he taught and they examined it by the other Scriptures, meaning they weren't just willing to trust a teacher. And they weren't just willing to trust an author. They tested everything by Scripture to make sure that everything they were learning was biblical.

Who wrote the Bible? And when we answer this question, the truth is that there really is a partnership between God, who is the divine author, and men, who are the human authors, and they're working together. And in saying this I am not saying that they were in some sort of catatonic state, that rather God was working through their personality, that God was working through their education, that God was working through their observation and experience to empower, to enable, to inspire – that's the word – to inspire them to perfectly write down an absolutely trustworthy and perfect record of what Scripture records.

Old Testament authors that are human are mentioned in many of the books: David, Moses, Joshua, Solomon, Nehemiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Habakkuk – you could just look those names up in a concordance and they actually appear in books of the Old Testament. They're named as the authors.

Sometimes the authors of the Old Testament would sit down and they would literally write out on a long scroll their book of the Bible. Other times they would speak or prophecy and then there would be a trained scribe – think someone more like a court stenographer who faithfully records what is being said. One example of that is in Jeremiah 36:4. It says, "Then Jeremiah called Baruch, the son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote on a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the Lord that he had spoken to him." So sometimes they pen their own book, sometimes they speak under divine inspiration and then it is faithfully recorded by a scribe.

Furthermore, the Old Testament prophets were fully aware that they spoke on behalf of God. More than 200 times the Old Testament prophets would say, "Thus saith the Lord," and they would then preach exactly God's word to them. And so God would speak to them, and then God would speak through them as they would proclaim, preach, prophecy the very words of God. And they declare this a few hundred times. Other statements as well in the Old Testament like, "The word of the Lord came to me," "God spoke to me," "God said to me" – those kinds of phrases appear – and this is almost staggering – 3,800 times in the Old Testament alone, roughly 3,800 times. So the continual declaration that "I'm telling you what God says," "This is God speaking," "This is God's word," "This is God's revelation," 3,800 times in various forms in the Old Testament.

Furthermore, then, when we get to the New Testament we see that the New Testament sees itself as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. There are at

least 300 direct quotations in the New Testament that are taken from the Old Testament. Furthermore, I was able to find in my research at least 4,000 allusions into the New Testament that refer back to the Old Testament: people, places, language, images, partial quotes, major concepts. And so the connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament is 300 verses quoted and 4,000 allusions made, absolutely threading together the Old and New Testament as one divine revelation from God.

The New Testament as well speaks of the Old Testament in this way. You'll remember Peter was the leader of the disciples, appointed by Jesus to lead the church after his resurrection and ascension. And here's what Peter says. "The prophets" – and here he's speaking of Old Testament prophets – "who prophesied about the grace" – the Old Testament is about the grace of God because God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. "The prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ."

So the first thing he tells us is that the Old Testament is about the grace of God that would be poured out through the death, burial, resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that the Old Testament prophets were speaking and writing of the coming of Jesus, who would be the giver of grace by the Spirit – the Holy Spirit – by the power of the Holy Spirit. That's divine inspiration, that God speaks to the prophet and then speaks through the prophet about Jesus.

He then goes on to declare, "And the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them" – again, revelation, okay? The Bible's not speculation, where we guess about God. The Bible is revelation, where God speaks to us. "It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves, but you. And the things that have not been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which the angels long to look." Here Peter connects the Old and New Testament. He said, "In the Old Testament, by the power of the Holy Spirit, they were proclaiming the coming of Jesus, who would be God, giving us grace." And he says, "That was fulfilled when Jesus came, lived, died, rose, and now we receive grace from Jesus, who is our great God and Savior, and that as the Holy Spirit empowered, inspired the Old Testament prophets, so now the Holy Spirit empower, inspires the New Testament apostles to proclaim the same message about salvation by grace alone in Jesus Christ alone."

And he says, "This is something that angels have longed to look into." That this is such an amazing truth, that even when the Old Testament was written the angels were wondering, "When will Jesus come? What exactly will it be like when God becomes a man? How exactly will it function that God will take away sin through Jesus and give grace?" And he says, "Now we're privileged to be in that position in history, where we understand through Scripture the prophets, the Old Testament writers, the apostles, the New Testament writers. We understand that Jesus is God and we're saved by grace from him, the same thing that angels for generations had longed to see."

Again, the New Testament is written by the inspiration, by the enabling of God the Holy Spirit, just as the Old Testament was. Jesus himself predicted this. I'll give you two examples. In John 14:6 we read from Jesus, "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." In John 16:14 Jesus promised, "He will take what is mine and declare it to you." While Jesus was alive on the earth he promised that after he died and after he rose and after he ascended and returned into heaven that the Holy Spirit would come to the apostles, the writers of the New Testament. That the Holy Spirit would remind them everything they heard, saw, and experienced, and furthermore that the Holy Spirit would enable them to faithfully record the writings of the New Testament to tell the true story without any error about the person and the work of Jesus.

~~SA~~ ~~the~~ ~~New~~ ~~Testament~~ ~~has~~ God worked, divinely inspiring through the Holy Spirit, the writing of the Old Testament Scriptures. human authors like Matthew – he writes 28 chapters in the New Testament. Mark writes 16 chapters. Luke writes 24 chapters. John writes 21 chapters. Paul writes 13 or 14 – there's a debate as to whether or not he wrote the book of Hebrews because Hebrews does not declare who the author is. Peter wrote eight chapters. James, Jesus' brother, wrote five. Jude, Jesus' other brother, wrote one.

And so the New Testament has human authors. Also, the Holy Spirit is the divine co-author. It says this, for example, in 1 Corinthians 2:13. Paul says, "We impart this in words not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the Holy Spirit." What Paul says is, "I'm not telling you something that I learned or made up. I'm telling you what God the Holy Spirit is revealing." 1 Corinthians 14:37 he says, Paul does, "The things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord." Just like the Old Testament prophet would say, "Thus sayeth the Lord," Paul told the Corinthian church, "And I am speaking on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a revelation." And Ephesians 3:4-5 speaks of the mystery of Christ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. That just as in the Old Testament there was divine inspiration, the Holy Spirit enabled, empowered the perfect writing of God's word through the prophets, so in the New Testament the apostles are in that same position. They are given the Holy Spirit to perfectly record what Scripture has revealed to us about who God is and what he has done through Jesus. That's why Paul says elsewhere in the New Testament that the church is built on the foundation of the prophets and the apostles.

The Holy Spirit inspired writers of the Old Testament, and the Holy Spirit inspired writers of the New Testament, foreshadowing Jesus and then recording the fulfillment of that foreshadowing with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

Now, altogether there's a doctrine that summarizes all of this called verbal plenary inspiration. And verbal plenary inspiration, or verbal plenary inerrancy, as some like to call it, is a doctrine that many evangelical Christians believed. It's been attacked regularly. There are some who would no longer use the language. At Mars Hill I think it's important for us to just be honest and tell you, because some do ask, "Do you believe in inerrancy?" That's sort of the shorthand language for verbal plenary inspiration or verbal plenary inerrancy. And the answer is yes, we do. We always have and we always will.

By verbal, what we mean is that the very words of the Bible – not just the concepts, but the actual words of the Bible are inspired of God. Jesus says this in Matthew 5:18, where he says, "Not the least stroke of the pen" – not the dotting of an I or the crossing of a T in Scripture will be neglected. He

says, "I'll fulfill all of it. We believe that the very words are important. We believe that God chose the very words of the Bible, and that every word is important and every word is selected by God the Holy Spirit, therefore every word really does matter.

Secondly, by plenary that means all of Scripture – all of Scripture. There are not parts of the Bible that we don't believe. There are not parts of the Bible that we don't like. There's not parts of the Bible that we won't teach. There's not parts of the Bible we won't reference. We believe that all of Scripture is God-breathed. Maybe a historical example of what this doesn't look like is Thomas Jefferson, one of our presidents who was a deist. He sat down with his copy of the Bible and with a pair of scissors cut out all the parts that he didn't believe were right. The result was he greatly reduced the Bible. He called it "The Philosophy of Jesus Christ." That's a very brazen thing to do. Some wouldn't be that obvious with their objection, but nonetheless they would avoid, neglect, abandon, disobey certain parts of the Bible. We don't.

We take this, again, from places like Proverbs 30:6, where it says, "Every word of God is flawless." Every word is flawless. All of Scripture – that's what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:16. "All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable," and profitable.

So verbal – we believe that the words of Scripture are miraculous revelation from God the Holy Spirit. Plenary – all of the Bible is from God. And inspiration – we believe it all comes from God, unlike every and any other book. There are no other books that are divinely inspired by God the Holy Spirit as Scripture is.

I'll give you a few verses on this. 2 Timothy 3:16 is probably the most classic verse on this doctrine of inerrancy, or verbal plenary inspiration. "All Scripture is breathed out by God," is breathed out by God. The Scripture is God's word to us. "And profitable" – see, we love you. We want you to have a life with Jesus, and all of Scripture is profitable. It's helpful. It's useful. It's not just true in the way that a phone book is – all the information is accurate. It's true in the way a loving relationship with someone who cares for you and converses with you and interacts with you and counsels you and comforts you and encourages you and confronts you – it's that kind of helpful. It's relationally, conversationally profitable. It's how God speaks to us. He speaks to us in Scripture, we speak to him in prayer.

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof" – that's correcting and rebuking us – "for correction, for training in righteousness that the man or person of God may be competent, equipped for every good work." Whatever it is in your life, you need the Bible – every good work. Principally it speaks to all of life: sexuality, work, worship, friendship, marriage, parenting, stewardship. It speaks in principle to everyone, and it speaks in principle about everything. And so there's no part of your life that should be disconnected from Scripture. There's no part of your life that doesn't need Scripture because Scripture is divinely inspired. And God's trying to speak into your life practically about things that really matter because he loves you and he wants to help.

Another example of divine inspiration is 2 Peter 1:20-21. "No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation." People didn't just make things up and put them in the Bible. They didn't just create ideas and write them down and say, "Well, that seems good to us." "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." That's divine inspiration. They didn't fully understand all that they were prophesying. When the Old Testament says that Jesus would be betrayed by a friend for 30 pieces of silver and buried in a rich man's tomb – hundreds of years in advance, born of a virgin in the town of Bethlehem – those kinds of prophecies weren't things that people made up. They couldn't have known the future. Only God knows the future.

Furthermore, they couldn't have seen the panoramic scope of history and predicted in advance in such excruciatingly amazing detail exactly what would happen with Jesus. But the Holy Spirit is God. He's all-knowing. He knows the future. He's sovereign over the future and he revealed to the authors of Scripture exactly what would happen, and that's what he said. The authors were carried along by the Holy Spirit. They held in their hand the pen, or their scribe did, as it were. But nonetheless, without the Holy Spirit they don't know anything about the coming of Jesus because they have speculation, rather than revelation. But because of the Holy Spirit they were able to tell us about the coming of Jesus in great detail.

Thirdly – 2 Peter 3:15-16 I think is very, very, very important. Peter again is the leader of the disciples, personally chosen, trained, and installed by Jesus. In the list of disciples he is always listed first because he is their leader. I want you to hear this, because some would say, "Well, when the guys wrote the New Testament they didn't think they were writing the Bible. It was hundreds of years later that people sort of made up the idea that these were divinely inspired books to be Scripture."

Here's what Peter said. He's speaking of Paul, who wrote more chapters of the New Testament than anyone – roughly twice as many chapters as Luke, who is the second most prolific author in the New Testament. He speaks of Paul. He says, "Paul also wrote" – so now we're into the writings of Paul. "Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him." Some of your translations will say "according to the wisdom that God gave him, as he does in all his letters." He's here speaking about the letters that Paul writes, right? Those are the letters of the New Testament.

"When he speaks in them of these matters there are some things in them that are hard to understand." Okay? Have you ever picked up your Bible and started reading Paul? You say, "Boy, that's hard to understand." Don't feel bad. Peter wrote the Bible and he said that sometimes Paul's hard to understand. Paul talks about predestination, election, right? Women wearing head coverings, speaking in tongues – a lot of the things that Christians still debate because they don't fully understand what Paul was trying to say. It was anticipated by Peter. It's not that what Paul is saying is not true. It's that when you're talking about God and life on the earth and the deep mysteries of our faith, some things are a little hard to understand.

Peter says, "Some things that Paul says are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction." Some people say, "Well, Paul says that a pastor should be a man. We don't like that. We're going to twist that." "Paul says that husbands should love his wife, wife should respect her husband. We don't like that. We're gonna cut that out or we're going to twist that so that it says something different." "Paul says that there really is a hell and if you don't belong to Jesus you're gonna go there. Well, we don't really like that so we're gonna twist that, cut that out, ignore that."

Sometimes what Paul says is hard to understand not because what he is saying is unclear but because we are unreceptive. I feel compelled at this point to tell you a verse in Romans 1. It says that some of us suppress the truth – I think it's Romans 1:18. It says that we suppress the truth because of the unrighteousness of our deeds. What he's saying is this. He's saying that sometimes the Bible is hard to understand. But sometimes it's not hard to understand, it's that we're unwilling to repent. I think it was Mark Twain said, "It's not the parts of the Bible that I read and don't understand which bother me, it's the parts of the Bible which I do read and do understand which bother me." Sometimes Paul is hard to understand because he's talking about very complicated things. Other times he's hard to understand because we don't like what the Bible says.

I'll give you one example. I was in college. I was a brand new Christian. I was arguing with one of my professors, he was a graduate student. And I was arguing about the life of Jesus and the death of Jesus and the burial and the resurrection of Jesus. And I really liked this guy. We were friends and we were kicking it around and he was one of my professors. And finally at some point I said, "So, it seems like you may believe that Jesus did live, die, and rise." I said, "So why are you not a Christian?" His answer was telling, but it was honest. He said, "I don't want to do what the Bible says I have to do if I'm a Christian." He said, "I want to do whatever I want to do, and I don't want to have God telling me what to do." The point there was that he could understand what the Scriptures said, he just didn't like it. It's not that he didn't understand, it's that he was unwilling to repent of his sin and obey the God of the Bible.

So I would say some would argue philosophically, "Well, the Bible's very hard to understand." Well, maybe some parts are difficult. But sometimes it may not be so much a problem with the Bible, which is perfect, as with us, who are imperfect, and not that the Bible is unclear, but perhaps we are unwilling. That's what Peter is inferring here.

Read it again with me, get us back on point. 2 Peter 3:15-16: "Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him. As he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters, there are some things in them" – Paul's letters – "that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and the unstable" – those who think they're smarter than God and want to cut things out of the Bible – "twist to their own destruction" – it ruins their life and soul and eternity – "as they do the other" – what? What's the word? Scriptures.

Paul's writing letters that are Scripture, that's what Peter says. Now, Peter is making this enormous claim that Paul's letters are not just books that are published or letters that are helpful, they're Scripture, just like Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Psalms. Just as those are Scriptures, so Paul's letters are Scripture, divinely inspired, God-breathed, revelation, God speaking to us perfectly through his word, penned by his servant.

That means that the Bible is written by men and God working together, human beings and God, who is divine. In this it's kind of like – not exactly like, but kind of like Jesus, who was fully man, fully God. So Scriptures are written by God in conjunction with men. In the days of the Protestant Reformation this led to the doctrine of Sola Scriptura. Sola Scriptura meaning Scripture is our highest authority. Scripture alone is our highest authority. We at Mars Hill believe this. We believe that Scripture is our metaphorical Supreme Court of highest authority. We're a Bible-believing, Bible-memorizing, Bible-studying, Bible-trusting, Bible-preaching, Bible-hearing church. That Scripture alone – Sola Scriptura – Scripture alone is our highest authority.

Now, some also called this Prima Scriptura, but the point is that there are lesser courts of authority. Let me distinguish Sola Scriptura from Solo Scriptura. Solo Scriptura is that Scripture alone is our authority. We don't believe that. We believe that Scripture alone is our highest authority. The Scriptures, for example, don't tell us how to perform open heart surgery. The Scriptures don't tell us how to repair a carburetor on an old vehicle. The Scriptures don't tell us how to turn a double play. If we want to learn any of those things we need to find that information elsewhere. All of the time we go to science, we go to medicine, we go to sociology, psychology, we go to history, we go to all kinds of disciplines and we learn. And that's all the result of general revelation, okay?

Back to one of my first points. The sciences, the social sciences, other means of learning all falls under the rubric of God's image bearers working with general revelation. Some people know things about technology and about the environment and about the human body and about medicine and about diet and nutrition and all these kind of things. And we believe in Sola Scriptura, and that is we have lesser courts of lower authority. You can go to college, go to the doctor, read a philosopher, study medicine, science – whatever it is, that's wonderful and good. That's enjoying general revelation in its full, and then testing general revelation by special revelation. That whatever we're learning there we have to check by Scripture and to see that it agrees with Scripture. If it doesn't disagree with Scripture, then we have freedom.

So you can be a Christian doctor, as Luke was, who wrote a book of the Bible – actually wrote two, Luke and Acts. You can be a Christian doctor and you can go to med school and you can say, "I want to study medicine, but I also test everything but Scripture. And if I get a class that says, you know, we don't bear the image and likeness of God, we don't have a soul and, you know, God can't heal through prayer, well, then I don't believe those things because the Bible tells me otherwise." And so think of it in terms of courts, that the Bible is Supreme Court of highest authority and there are lesser, lower courts of medicine and science and reason and tradition and history and experience. And we use them all the time and we test them by highest court.

We'll move on to the last question, "Why can we trust that the Bible is accurate?" And this last question of why we could trust that the Bible is accurate is very important because here we are speaking about the English translation that we hold in our hand. Could we trust it? Could we trust it? And there are really two issues at stake. One is how many of those transcribed manuscripts do we have? And two, how old are they? In comparison to the original, how much time had lapsed? See, if we have many copies that are close to the original then we don't have time for mistakes to be made. But if we only have a few copies that are far removed from the original there is great opportunity for error in the translation of the Bible because our English

translation relies on manuscripts, older copies.

Now, first thing I'll say, and then I'll show you why I think you should believe it. I want to stress that Jesus worked from a translation. Jesus didn't work from the original Autographa. What Jesus, in Luke 4, for example, read from the scroll of Isaiah, that wasn't the original scroll of Isaiah. That was a copy. That was a copy. So Jesus worked from copies. Jesus had access to translations. He trusted them and we should, too.

But I'll show you this chart, and I think it's helpful. And what I would say is we should treat the New Testament like we do the rest of the canon of western literature. I'll give you some examples. Probably in high school or college most of you had to read Homer. We don't know how old the earliest copy is. From the time it was originally written to the earliest manuscript we have, we just don't know, and there's only 643 copies.

Likewise, Plato – anyone who studied philosophy, you start with Socrates, Plato, Aristotle. Plato, we only have seven copies, early copies, manuscripts of Plato's work. And the earliest is 1,300 years removed from the writing of the original. Yet no one is saying, "Let's get rid of Plato. We can't trust Plato. How do we know that this is what Plato really said?"

Aristotle – similarly we only have five ancient copies of Aristotle's work. And the earliest copy is 1,400 years removed from the original – 1,400 years. Caesar, as well – you all studied Caesar at some point in history. We only have ten copies of Caesar's work and the earliest copy is 950 years removed from the original. Tacitus – some of his work in history is very helpful. We only have 20 copies and the earliest is about 1,000 years old from the original.

Now, taking these pieces of literature that are accepted within the western canon, that are taught in high schools and colleges and accepted as historically accurate and factual. From these copies, manuscripts, translations are made that we all read and no one has any question about them, even in English. The New Testament, we have about 14,000 copies. It's not even comparable. The next closest in this illustration is 600. And the date from the original to the oldest manuscript that we have, some would say – and this is very generous, even to the skeptics and critics – is 100 years. A man named Carsten Peter Thiede – he's a secular papyrologist, he said that he can date certain fragments of the gospels back to the 60s, meaning within 30 or 40 years after Jesus was actually walking the earth, while many of the eyewitnesses were still alive.

My point is simply to reject the New Testament by saying, "Well, we don't have enough manuscripts," or, "They're too far removed from the original," or, "How do we know that's what they originally said?" is completely absurd and it's academically irresponsible. Were we to treat the rest of the canon of western literature with the same degree of scrutiny as the New Testament we would have no ancient books.

Again, the books were written on very fragile forms of paper. They weren't stored in modern-day heating and cooling facilities like a library is. The fact that we have any manuscripts is a miracle of God. The fact that we have as many as we do is overwhelming evidence that God wants us to be able to trust the Scriptures.

And some would say, "But there are variations between the manuscripts." The truth is that when you're hand copying 14,000 manuscripts there are a few minor spelling and punctuation errors. But with 14,000 manuscripts, if you have 13,900 that all agree and 100 that do not, you can assume that the mistakes are in those 100. And again, it's punctuation and spelling, which you as well as I know that if someone gave us a pen and told us to write the New Testament 14,000 times we would miss a comma, we would misspell a word at some point no matter how hard we tried.

Additionally, less than one percent of any of the debated material that is in the New Testament has anything to do with any major doctrine. Most scholars agree that we're looking at far less than one percent of any potential misspellings or punctuation in the manuscripts relates in any way to any major doctrinal issue. Most of the errors are something like saying "Christ Jesus," when it was "Jesus Christ" in the writing – sort of flipping the words, as it were, which in the end is not an enormous error and it doesn't really change who we're talking about or what is being said.

And so what I would like to just stress is that it is most reasonable, it is most humble, it is most acceptable to believe in the New Testament as we have it. That God has given us ample number of ancient manuscripts closely written to the date of the original Autographa so that we could trust the Bible.

And I would close with this. My final question is really the big idea, and that is, "What is a biblical life?" I'll tell you my story in closing. When I was 19 years of age I was in college. I was not a Christian and everyone was talking about Jesus. All of my classes were talking about Jesus at the state university, most of them critiquing him. Everybody had an opinion about Jesus and I decided out of curiosity to just read the Bible for myself to see what the Bible said about Jesus and to see what Jesus said about himself.

And if you're a person who's never done that, that would be my encouragement. Start in the gospel of John if you don't know where to start, and just start reading your Bible. And if you don't have one, get a Bible. We give them out at our campuses. You can pick them up everywhere. God in his grace has given us so many great Bibles. We would encourage you to get an English Standard version of the Bible. It's a great literal translation. And just read it.

And I started reading the Bible in college and God absolutely changed my life. I was convicted that I was a sinner. I was convicted that God was holy, righteous, and good. I was convicted that Jesus was God become a man, lived without sin, and died on a cross in my place for my sins. I was convinced that Jesus rose from death, and I confirmed that fact with non-Christian historians, and so it was incontrovertibly true. I gave my life to Jesus. You know what? The Holy Spirit has resided in me since I was 19 years of age. He regenerated my heart, gave me new desires. He renewed my mind, gave me a love for Scripture. And by God's grace, since then – I'm not saying I'm perfect, I'm not saying I haven't made errors, I'm not saying I'm not still learning – but by God's grace I've been living, with the Holy Spirit's enablement, a biblical life. Repenting when I do sin, loving my wife, my kids, studying the Bible, memorizing, preaching, teaching – my whole life is the Bible.



Mars Hill loves the Scriptures because they reveal to us God. We don't worship the Bible, but we read the Bible to learn about the God who we do worship and how he has loved us so well through Jesus. And so the Scriptures are the means by which God tells us who he is, and how much he loves us and cares for us, so that we could repent of sin, that we could think his thoughts after him, that we could live life with him, both now and forever.

And so a biblical life is one that receives Jesus Christ as Lord. A biblical life is one that repents of sin. When we read the Bible and we see that we have erred in our ways, we repent of that and we thank Jesus for his death which takes away sin. We rejoice in God's grace and we – we respond when God speaks to us. That's a biblical life. It's not coming to the Bible just for information, but transformation; not just to learn more facts, but to be a totally new person to go and live a totally new life with, for, by, like, through, to Jesus, who is the Word of God incarnate revealed to us in the Word of God – Scripture, written.

And all I can say is this: My whole life has been changed by the Bible, by reading the Bible, studying the Bible, memorizing the Bible, meditating on the Bible, preaching the Bible, teaching the Bible, obeying the Bible, and sharing it with others. All of Mars Hill Church, all of my life, all of my family, all of my ministry is in many ways the result of this book. Everything good is the result of this book being used by God the Holy Spirit to change my life and other people's lives so that we would look more like Jesus, by the grace of God. And that's what we want for all of you. We want the Bible in your hand. We want the Holy Spirit in your heart. We want Jesus on your horizon. And we want you to live a biblical life. I'll pray.

Father God, I thank you for the Scriptures, that you are a loving God, that you are a speaking God, that you're a God who speaks to us. I thank you for general revelation. We enjoy you and we enjoy your creation. And God, we thank you for special revelation, that you have told us who you are and you have shown us, through Jesus, how sin could be taken away and relationship can be restored. God, it is my request that we would humbly come to your Word, not just for information but for transformation. Not just so that we could argue well, but that we could live a biblical life. I pray we would read the Scriptures, memorize the Scriptures, study the Scriptures, meditate on the Scriptures, hear the Scriptures, love the Scriptures, and obey the Scriptures because, God, ultimately it's how you speak to us. Please give us ears to hear and hearts to receive your Word, minds to trust in your truth. We ask this in Jesus' good name. Amen.