

Sunday, December 13, 2015—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 12: Potential Pitfalls of Plenary Inspiration

Introduction

- Last week in Lesson 11 we began our study of inspiration by looking at the various views positioned by theologians over the years to explain the doctrine. In summation these views included:
 - Natural View
 - Dynamic View
 - Partial View or Spiritual-Rule-Only View
 - Existential View
 - Plenary Verbal View
- After surveying these views, we determined that the *Plenary Verbal View* is the correct position. The word *Plenary* means “all” and the word *Verbal* means “words”. The *Plenary Verbal View* of inspiration says that all of the **words** are inspired by God.
- Matthew 24:35—what is important is not just the ideas, the content, what it says about spiritual things, or when it speaks to you, but the words themselves are the issue in inspiration – “my words.” It is not just the concepts, the message, or the thought, but the fact that the words that I speak to you shall not pass away.
- We concluded Lesson 11 with the following quotation from Norman L. Geisler’s *Systematic Theology In One Volume* regarding *Plenary Verbal* Inspiration.
 - “Numerous passages make it evident that the locus of revelation and inspiration is the written word, the Scriptures (*graphē*), not simply the idea or even the writer. . . So it wasn’t simply God’s message that men were free to state in their words; the very choice of the words was from God. . . Biblical inspiration is not only verbal (located in the words), but it is also plenary, meaning that it *extends to every part of the words and all they teach or imply*. Inspiration does guarantee the truth of all that the Bible teaches, implies, or entails. . . The inspiration of God, then extends to every part of Scripture, including everything God affirmed (or denied) about any topic. It is inclusive of not only what the Bible teaches explicitly but also what it teaches implicitly, covering not only spiritual matters but factual ones as well.” (Geisler, 174-175)
- As the title suggests in the lesson, we want to briefly consider some of the potential pitfalls or practical inconsistencies/misconceptions associated with the *Plenary Verbal* position.

Potential Pitfalls of the Plenary Position

- I believe that the *Plenary Verbal View* is the correct Biblical view of inspiration. That being said there are a few potential pitfalls regarding Plenary Inspiration that we need to be aware of so that we can avoid them.

- We will discuss three potential pitfalls with the following sub points.
 - The main issue with inspiration is the words on the page not what happened to the human authors.
 - *Plenary Verbal* inspiration is meaningless without Preservation.
 - *Plenary Verbal* on Inspiration but Dynamic on translation.

Words Not the Men

- In Grace School of the Bible, Brother Jordan highlights the first potential pitfall with the *Plenary Verbal View* of inspiration as being an over emphasis on what happened to the writers and not on their writings i.e., what they wrote down. He does this by comparing two different definitions of inspiration from the pens of Kenneth Wuest and W.E. Vine.
 - Wuest—“Inspiration is the act of God the Holy Spirit enabling the Bible writers to write down God-chosen words infallibly.” (*Untranslatable Riches from the Greek New Testament*)
 - Regarding Wuest’s definition, Brother Jordan stated, “Now, that is a good definition. God chose the words; and they write them down infallibly, which means they are all right, not just some of them but all of them. And it is the words!” (Jordan, *MSS 101-Lesson 2*)
 - Vine—“Inspiration attaches not only to the thought but to the words by which the thought is expressed. Words are signs with a definite value. Defect in the signs involves defect in the meaning conveyed. Inspiration of the scripture is inspiration of words, and the words themselves must be taken to express its real intention” (*The Divine Inspiration of the Bible*)
 - In response to Vine’s definition, Brother Jordan said, “Now that is good thinking. Dynamic Inspiration says that words are just signs that represent concepts and thoughts, so what is important is the concept and the thought. But, if you have a sign that does not convey the proper thought, then you will have a defect in communication. So, inspiration has to attach itself, not just to the thought but to the words that are conveyed; because the words are signs by which the thought is expressed, and words have a definite value. A defect in the sign of the word, involves defect in the meaning that is conveyed by the word. So, that is good thinking.” (Jordan, *MSS 101-Lesson 2*)
- After commenting thusly, Brother Jordan prompts his students to note the subtle difference between the two definitions of inspiration presented above. Wuest placed the emphasis on “the act of God the Holy Spirit enabling the Bible writers to write” whereas Vine placed the emphasis on the “words” themselves and not on what happened to the human writers.
- II Timothy 3:16—once again, the doctrine of inspiration is primarily concerned with the words that were written down, not what happened to the writers themselves. You must remember that the Bible never says that the men were inspired. The Bible always says that what they wrote is inspired. All scripture, (*graphē*, that which is written down), is inspired. It is not the men that are

inspired. Now, something happens to the men, “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (II Peter 1:21—we will study what happened to them as well), but the issue in inspiration is what is written down on the page, not just what happened to the men.

- In 1840, Swiss Protestant Louis Gaussen wrote *Theopneustia; or, the Plenary Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures* in French (*Théopneustie, Ou, Inspiration Plénière Des Saintes Écritures*). The following year, in 1841, an English version was published in Edinburgh, Scotland. Today, Gaussen’s work was reprinted and made available by Kregel Publications in 1971 under the title *The Divine Inspiration of the Bible*.
- Originating in 1840, Gaussen’s work sits at theological crossroads within the 19th century. Gaussen was aware of the textual work of Johann Jakob Griesbach from 1774-1775 but predated the discovery of Codex Sinaiticus, by Constantin von Tischendorf in 1844. Consequently, Gaussen’s work represents a popular Protestant view of inspiration before the eruption of the following controversies in the latter half of 19th century: Darwinian evolution, German higher criticism, textual theories of Westcott & Hort, and the resulting debates between fundamentalists and modernists.
- Throughout his work Gaussen is clear that the main issue of inspiration is not what happened to the writers but what they wrote down. While examples abound please consider the following few in summation of Gaussen’s view of inspiration:

- “Theopneustia (inspiration) is not a system, it is a fact; and this fact, like everything else that has taken place in the history of redemption, is one of the doctrines of our faith. . .

Meanwhile it is of consequence for us to say, and it is of consequence that it be understood, that this miraculous operation of the Holy Ghost had not the sacred writers themselves for its object—for these were only his instruments, and were soon to pass away; but that its objects were the holy books themselves, where were destined to reveal from age to age, to the Church, the counsels of God, and which were never to pass away.” (Gaussen, 24)

- “Whether they recite the mysteries of a past more ancient than creation, or those of a future more remote than the coming of the Son of man, or the eternal counsels of the Most High, or the secrets of man’s heart, or the deep things of God—whether they describe their emotions, or related what they remember, or repeat contemporary narratives, or copy over genealogy, or mark extract from uninspired documents—their writing is inspired, their narratives are directed from above; it is always God who speaks, who relates, who ordains or reveals by their mouth, and who, in order to do this, employs their personality in different measures: for “the Spirit of God has been upon them,” it is written, “and his word has been upon their tongue.” And though it be always the word of man, since they are always men who utter it, it is always, too, the word of God, seeing that it is God who superintends, employs, and guides them. They give their narratives, their doctrines, or their commandments, “not with the words of man’s wisdom, but with the word taught by the Holy Ghost;” and thus it is that God himself had not only put his seal to all these facts, and constituted himself the author of these commands, and the revealer of all these truths, but that, further, has caused them to be given to his Church in the order, and in the measure, and in the terms which he has deemed most suitable to his heavenly purpose.” (Gaussen, 25)

- “And were we further, called to say at least what the men of God experienced in their bodily organs, in their will, or in their understandings, while engaged in tracing the pages of the sacred book, we should reply, that the powers of inspiration were not felt by all the same degree, and that their experiences were not at all uniform; but we might add, that the knowledge of such a fact bears very little on the interests of our faith, seeing that, as respects that faith, we have to do with the book, and not with the man. It is the book that is inspired, and altogether inspired: to be assured of this ought to satisfy us.” (Gausson, 26)
- “These assertions (II Peter 1:21 and Psalm 12:6-7), which are themselves testimonies of the Word of God, have already comprised our last definition of Divine Inspiration, and lead us to characterize it, finally, as the inexplicable power which the Divine Spirit put forth of old on the authors of holy Scripture, in order to their guidance even in the employment of words they used, and to preserve them alike from all error and from all omission.” (Gausson, 34)
- Gausson strongly asserts that the main issue of inspiration was the production of a book and the words contained within it. As we will see in a future lesson, Gausson also had no problem maintaining a belief that God dictated the words of Scripture to the human authors while at the same time using each man’s personality and style in the writing process. It was not until some years later, during their controversy with the Modernists that the notion of Divine Dictation fell out of favor with Fundamentalists and Evangelicals.
- Pastor Jordan offers the following theological definition of inspiration offered by Charles F. Baker in his *A Dispensational Theology* as an example of an inadequate definition of inspiration.
 - “Theologically it means the supernatural divine superintendency **exerted over the writers of the Scripture** which guaranteed the accuracy of their writings.” (Baker, 37)
- While Pastor Baker believed in the *Plenary Verbal View* (See *A Dispensational Theology* pages 42-45) his definition focuses more on what happened to the writers than on the words they actually wrote down.
- Potential pitfall number one of the *Plenary Verbal View* is to overemphasize what happened to the writers in inspiration instead of focusing on what was written down i.e., the words.

Preservation Secures the Plenary Position

- In Grace School of the Bible, Pastor Jordan explains that while *Plenary Verbal* is the correct view of inspiration, its acceptance is meaningless without also accepting the doctrine of preservation. It is the doctrine of preservation that will help the Bible student identify where the words originally given by inspiration can be found today.
- As we have already seen in this class, Brother Jordan is not alone regarding this conclusion. Many other pastors and theologians have come to similar conclusions. Agreement on every point with the writers quoted below should not be assumed.
 - *Edward F. Hills*—“If the doctrine of divine inspiration of the Old and New Testament Scripture is a true doctrine, the doctrine of the providential preservation of the Scriptures must also be a true doctrine. It must be that down through the centuries God has

exercised a special providential control over the copying of the Scriptures and the preservation and use of the copies, so that trustworthy representatives of the original text have been available to God's people in every age. God must have done this, for if He gave the Scriptures to His Church by inspiration as the perfect and final revelation of His will, then it is obvious that **He would not allow this revelation to disappear or undergo any alteration of its fundamental character.**

Although this doctrine of the providential preservation of the Old and New Testament Scriptures has sometimes been misused, nevertheless, it also has been held, either implicitly or explicitly, by all branches of the Christian Church as a necessary consequence of the divine inspiration of these Scriptures. (Hills, 2)

- Hills' point about the implicit belief in preservation is evident in Gausson's book quoted above even though it is not explicitly stated.
- *Wilbur N. Pickering*—" . . . **if the Scriptures have not been preserved, then the doctrine of Inspiration is a purely academic matter with no relevance for us today.** If we do not have the inspired words or do not know precisely which they be, then the doctrine of Inspiration is inapplicable." (Fuller, 269)
- *Samuel C. Gipp*—"Could God who overcame time (about 1,700 years transpired from the writing of the oldest Old Testament book and closing of the New Testament in 90 A.D.) and man's human nature to write the Bible perfectly in the first place, do the same thing to preserve it?" . . . it is always to be remembered that the Bible is a spiritual book which God exerted supernatural force to conceive, and it is reasonable to assume that he could exert that same supernatural force to preserve." (Gipp, 18-22)
- *R.B. Ouellette*—"In the Bible, the writers had no problem quoting Scripture that had been preserved up to that time. Peter quotes Isaiah 40 (I Peter 1:23-25); Paul quotes extensively from the Old Testament in Romans 9-11. Each time a New Testament writer quotes from the Old Testament, he is demonstrating that God has been able to preserve His word. **Preservation is highly debated today because ultimately, the preservation issue will decide the translation issue—and preservation is completely a matter of faith in God's power.**" (Ouellette, 33)
- In short, why go through all the trouble arguing for the inspiration of every word (*Verbal*) in all parts of Scripture (*Plenary*) and then fail to protect that doctrine by either ignoring or rejecting preservation? I agree with Pickering, if the Scriptures were not preserved "then the doctrine of Inspiration is a purely academic matter with no relevance for us today." (Fuller, 269)
- Potential pitfall number two is to accept the *Plenary Verbal View* of inspiration but fail to protect it with the doctrine of preservation.

Plenary Verbal on Inspiration but Dynamic on Translation

- A third caution is also offered by Brother Jordan regarding those who would identify themselves as believing in *Plenary Verbal* inspiration, yet at the same time adopt a *Dynamic* approach when it comes to translating God's word.

- “Plenary Verbal is the right one, but we recognize a basic inadequacy in it, and that is that it does not equip us to also identify where those inspired words are. We will have to do that on our own, and I will show you how to do that.

Let me explain the danger of the inadequacy. A man believes in Plenary Verbal Inspiration (every word is verbally inspired). There used to be a method of translating used down through the centuries called a Literal Equivalency. Because you believed in Plenary Verbal Inspiration, if you began to translate, what would you translate? You would translate every word. You would try to put the words in the other language, because the words are the issue. But, now we have something that is called Dynamic Equivalent, and that is the basis of the translating methods of the New International Version. That is the first version that has been put out in English in the last few years (it came out in 1976) that has gone over and taken Dynamic Inspiration, and applies that method of inspiration to the practice of translating.

Now, the men that did that believe in Plenary Verbal Inspiration, but when they began to handle the word of God, and when they got into the practice of translating the word of God, they adopted and were affected by Dynamic Inspiration in their translating methods. So, as far as their translating methods are concerned, they abandon the Plenary Verbal viewpoint, professing to hold it, and use Dynamic Inspiration.” (Jordan, *MSS 101-Lesson 2*)

- Pitfall number three regarding *Plenary Verbal Inspiration* centers around one who accepts it as the correct view on the Bible’s origin, yet functionally denies it when it comes to their philosophy of translation. In short it seems inconsistent to hold to the inspiration of every word only to turn around and advocate for a Dynamic Philosophy of translation.
- That being said, Brother Jordan also acknowledges that even the most literal of translations, such as the KJB, must from time to time utilize a *Dynamic* method when doing the work of translating. It is when translators adopt Dynamic Equivalency as their “total method” that the *Plenary Verbal View* of inspiration is undermined.
 - “Consequently there is a method developed whereby every translator uses Dynamic Equivalency at times. When you read in your King James Bible where it says, “God Forbid”, that is a dynamic equivalent. There is no word for “God” in the Greek text. In Greek it would just be, “Oh no!” Well, in our language, “God Forbid” is the same type of strong expletive. It is a dynamic equivalent.

All translators use Dynamic Equivalency at some time or another in every situation. It especially helps you to get through idiomatic expressions, which is a legitimate thing. But, adopted as a total method, you abandon Plenary Verbal Inspiration. And you teach the next and the next and the next generation not to believe in Plenary Verbal.” (Jordan, *MSS 101-Lesson 2*)

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