

Inspiration, Inerrancy & Infallibility & Our Incessant Need to Have A “Perfect” Text



*The evangelist Matthew
and the angel - Rembrandt*

Claims are often made about the text of the bible that the text never makes about itself. These claims are usually dressed up with the titles *infallible*, *inerrant*, or *inspired*. All too often, the attempt at dealing with these topics is something of a minefield, filled with areas of dangerous terrain. We need not fear taking an objective look at what has become the object of our faith in so many arenas. Doubt and uncertainty are friends of faith, not foes. In doubting we find ourselves driven to study, driven to find answers, and driven to question those answers. In uncertainty we find ourselves driven to search out what is certain, and to reevaluate our faith and dogma. However, when the idol of certainty begins to creep in again we are coming dangerously close to a prison of faux faith, a cage of infallibility. As we look into these topics, we must learn to

keep an open mind, and to realize that much of what we hold fast is not ancient faith, as though Jesus himself had dictated it, but rather recent inventions of the minds of humans, usually trying to make sense of a group of documents that at times seem to have issues of disconnection and various historical, clerical, and translational errors.

As we progress through this essay, we will discuss what I am going to call the *classic* views of *inspiration*, *inerrancy* and *infallibility*, showing where the beliefs come from, and then offering an *alternative* view to the previously accepted belief. I am not declaring myself to be a decision maker on matters of the faith, I'm rather simply offering an alternate understanding to something that ought to be open to the halls of discussion rather than locked away for none to investigate. I am also not trying to advocate the dismissal of the text, or a mass Bible burning across the globe. I hold the scripture at an extremely high value in my life and the life of the believer. I firmly believe that there are answers to all of life's problems found in the pages of the book, but that doesn't mean that every word is an answer!

We should start with the question of from where do these beliefs come? For the most part, the idea of *inerrancy* and *inspiration* comes via the doctrine of *sola scripture* - latin for "by scripture alone" and the idea that all that is necessary for holiness and salvation are contained in the

scriptures. Only certain sects of Evangelical Christianity actually consider this to mean that the text is self-interpreting (the text defines the text) and the very belief itself only came about during the Protestant Reformation. The Reformers offered this view of scripture largely because of reaction to the Catholic Church and their idea that only a select few could interpret the text. Luther and the Reformers needed a text that interpreted itself to rid themselves of the Catholic hierarchy once and for all. While the Reformers themselves would not have shied away from scholarly interpretation, their assertions about the text have been used by some to encourage such action. Without the need for scholarly interpretation, the text in essence has become the “pope”, and serves to be an “answer from God” rather than religious systems and hierarchies.

There was nothing inherently wrong with the need for interpretation apart from a religious hierarchy, however what was lost is that the text is indefinable without the community about whom it speaks, and from whom it stems, namely - the Church. Needless to say, this was not a commonly accepted belief until a century after the Reformation, which leaves us in a bit of a quandary about this whole idea. If it is a modern invention of some that stemmed from a reactionary discourse against religious systems, and not something the text itself had declared, what are we to do with it today?

Let’s look at the ideas of inspiration, inerrancy and infallibility - as well as the thought of the text defining the text - a little more closely, and see what the text *does* have to say, as well as what it *does not* have to say about the topics at hand.

Inspiration - *the classic view*

The classic view of the *inspiration of scripture* is that 100% of the text we have in our 66 book Protestant Bible is inspired of God, divinely dictated and penned by the Holy Spirit through the hands of men. The picture that comes to mind is almost as though the men and women who wrote the text were in a trance while the Spirit of God moved their hands to create the text. The often-quoted proof text to the view that 100% of what we would call *scripture* is inspired is **2 Timothy 3:16-17**. Paul, writing to a young pastor, tells him (in our English KJV version) *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

As it is written in our English transliterations the author of Timothy would seem to be very concrete in his understanding that *all scripture is inspired* (many versions offer different ideas such as *God breathed* etc). As we are all well aware, the Bible was not written or copied in

English, it was written in Greek and Hebrew as well as Aramaic. For this text, the Greek offers a little different approach. The Greek text of v16 reads “*pasa graphē theopneustos kai ōphelimos pros elegchos pros epanorthōsis pros paideia en dikaiosynē.*” Together these words transliterate literally to read - “*all scripture inspired of God indeed is profitable with regard to teachings with regard to censure or correction with regard to improvement and with regard to education in upright behavior*”. In a message to me, scholar and theologian Michael Hardin says, “The verb 'to be' is often omitted, this doesn't mean anything. It is a question of the article (or lack thereof actually) for *pasa graphe* that raises the question of 'each scripted inspired is' (RSV margin) or 'all scripture is inspired.’”¹ In his forthcoming book *What the Facebook? Posts from the edge of Christendom*, Mr. Hardin makes the statement “There are really only three proof texts that can be urged in favor of a theory of inspiration, the most significant being 2 Tim. 3:16. However even here the text can arguably be translated “Every scripture that is inspired by God is useful for...” It does not necessarily assert that ALL scripture is inspired. This also begs the question of canonicity since for the Protestant, the same church which canonized the Old and New Testaments also canonized the Apocrypha. It also begs the question of whether it is the Hebrew text that is inspired, as is found in all Protestant versions of inspiration or the Greek versions, including the Septuagint, which the Orthodox church claims is inspired and which is used by the vast majority of the New Testament writers. It also begs the question as to how much other versions of Scripture might be inspired, like the Targums, from whence the Pastoral author, just three verses previously had taken the names of the two opponents of Moses, Jannes and Jambres. There are far too many questions surrounding 2 Tim 3:16 to simply argue that it says “all scripture is inspired” and means ALL the original manuscripts of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament. Even if it does, it says nothing at all about Scripture being inerrant or infallible, these are (false) implications drawn by Protestant Scholasticism and contemporary Fundamentalists and conservative Evangelicals.”²

In examining the letter to Timothy, we first of all note, “*all scripture inspired of God...*” This would mean that there are portions we can understand to be *uninspired*. This might grate some the wrong way, but the truth is the truth. The very fact that we no longer have 1 Enoch in our Bible today (a book that Jesus Himself may have viewed as “scripture” and one quoted by Jude) would lead me to believe that there were “inspired” portions taken out, as well as “uninspired” portions left in. This is not a problem for me. It is beautiful that the Almighty Creator allowed the creation to take part in telling His story, even when we utterly blew it.

Secondly note, “Scripture” at the time this letter was penned for many certainly included 1 Enoch, Maccabees, parts of Jeremiah we no longer use, as well as several other books and prophecies that have not survived today. What does this mean for us? It means that the old adage

“take the WHOLE counsel” is literally impossible. It leaves us holding a fragment, a mire of human text with portions that were certainly divinely inspired (though I don’t believe this means ‘divinely penned’) and portions that were history remembered along with (as Marcus Borg would put it) “history metaphorized”.³

Third, note that scripture is indeed profitable for many areas of life, with the condition that it be the “inspired” portions of scripture. How are we to tell? This is where I believe theology to be of utmost importance. Theology teaches us the nature of the Father, and no theologian ever spoke more clearly than the Father’s Eternal Son, the man Christ Jesus. His revelation of the Father showed a God unwilling to do without humanity, a God unwilling to condemn the sinner, a God unwilling to reprimand the “lost” and a God whose view of the law flew in the face of the written text. (This can be shown, e.g., by “you have heard it said, but I say” or “It is written in the law, but I say unto you” spoken by Jesus in Matthew Sermon on the Mount). Jesus’ utter unwillingness to do anything other than heal, restore, and reveal the Father to the world around Him speaks volumes of His “theological” stance.

Inspiration - *an alternate view*

When looking at the *inspiration* of scripture, I believe we can take an alternative view to understanding what it means to be *inspired* by God. To the ancient Greek, there was a goddess known as the *muse* who was the goddess of inspiration for literature, science and the arts. The men or women involved in creating the piece were *inspired* to do so by the singing of the muse, or even the very presence of the muse. They were then *moved* to create their work of art, literature or science. Knowing what we know now about things in the realm of science, we know the understanding of many of the ancient thoughts in the scientific realm to be incorrect. Does this then mean they were not inspired? In the same fashion, when Da Vinci painted his famous painting *The Mona Lisa* it seemed to be *inspired* by a woman with a perfect complexion, and mysterious smile. Would finding out that the woman had the occasional pimple or blemish remove our idea the Da Vinci was *inspired* by her to create his masterpiece? Probably not!

The bible (in my opinion) is like the Mona Lisa. It is a masterpiece of human creation, with the divine Godhead as the muse. The Holy Spirit *inspired* the text by men beholding the Triune God and beginning to try to articulate in human tongue the mysteries of the divine. The very nature of human is to make mistakes, it’s part of who we are, thus the adage *to err is human, to forgive divine*. And this the truth of the text. Certainly while there are human errors involved, yet the divine forgave the errors and allowed men to pen the story of God, at times mistakenly, and rather than correct with swift retribution, the Father simply forgave and moved forward with His

beloved children. Yet what we have before us today is a large grouping of believers who - mostly through human traditions - have their faith structured in such a way that if anything is found to be incorrect in the text, it either crumbles or causes them to rise in defense of something indefensible. This brings us to our next topic.

Inerrancy - *the classic view*

The classic view of the *inerrancy of scripture* is that the text in its entirety is correct in all its assertions and assumptions. More extreme beliefs would say that this means that any scientific finding that does not confirm the text must therefore be incorrect, because the text is the measure by which we determine the correctness (or incorrectness) of all things relating to human history and development. As we discussed briefly earlier, the idea that the text interprets itself is a rather modern invention who needed a means of breaking with the Catholic hierarchy. It was a much needed break; however, we are not living in that time any longer. We are in a time of information exchange like never before, and in that exchange we are able to look deeper into the text and bypass the religious traditions that would assert otherwise. Because of this, we have been able to learn through science, history, and even various other scriptural texts that the current state of the nature of the Bible is, to put it lightly, less than perfect.

Again what we have is a belief that is not ever set forth by the text itself, rather it is imposed upon the text by humans trying to make sense of divine thoughts and ideas penned through human hands and spoken by human tongues. There are a few proof-texts offered for the idea of inerrancy. One such text is Hebrews 4:12 - *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* First we should note that the author makes no claims of *inerrancy* in his or her writing. They simply declare that the word is useful for our life, or rather the life of the reader. Second, we should discuss a bit about what the *word* is. John tells us in his gospel that the *word* was made flesh, Jesus Christ. The understanding we ought to take from this is that the word of God is not the text on the page, though the text often speaks about the word. Jesus Himself says in John 5:39 - *You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.* Jesus is clearly outlining what the scripture is about. And to His mind (rightly) they are all about Him! What does this say to us today? To me, the idea is that the Bible is only the scripture inasmuch as it declares the Father, the scripture is only the gospel inasmuch as it declares the Father's love, and the gospel is only the word inasmuch as it declares Jesus Christ! Jesus continually showed people that they had no idea who the Father really was, mostly by offering healing, release and freedom from religious oppression, diseases, and societal extrusion.

I'll not go so far as to say the Bible *is not* the word of God. Certainly it is. But I will say the Bible is only rightly divided as the word of God when it reveals who the Godhead really is. That is a topic for another essay! We are dealing with the idea of *inerrancy*. The dictionary would define *inerrancy* as *a lack of error or having no errors*. Seems pretty straight forward, but we need a good starting point. For the text itself to have no errors, we must understand that there are certainly times when the author's intent is lost to time, and there are areas open for interpretation. Those are not the areas we will be addressing. There are however, areas of scripture in which no interpretive guideline is necessary to see the apparent contradiction in the text. Let's look at a few of these to see where we find ourselves.

In Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and John 13 we have the wonderful story of the Last Supper. The image that comes to mind is that of the beautiful painting, Jesus sitting in the midst of His disciples, enjoying a final meal and offering another teaching. Here is where the contradiction comes in. The synoptic gospels (Matt, Mark & Luke) offer the same timeline for the supper. They each say the event took place the night of the Passover feast. Matt 26:17a - *Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread*, Mark 14:12a - *And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the Passover*; and Luke 22:7a - *Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the Passover must be killed*. John however, says something different. In 13:1 John says - *Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father*. John 18:28 would confirm this assertion - *and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the Passover*. So to three of the writers the meal took place the night of Passover, and to John the meal took place the night before. This is an occasion of there being a *correct* and *incorrect* remembrance on the part of the author. Who is right? Who is wrong? Does this then mean that one, or three, of the writers were therefore not *inspired*? No! One, or three, of the authors simply remembered the event differently. N.T. Wright has done some amazing work offering explanations for John's needing the meal to happen on the night before Passover. I am not here to speak on the why, simply the fact that there is an obvious, no interpretation needed, historical contradiction in the text. The simple fact is, either the Synoptics or John is incorrect in rendering of the story.

The book of Daniel, specifically chapter 11, offers us another error. This time, historically. The author "prophesies" that Antiochus IV would die in Israel and that Israel would then be finally delivered from bondage to foreign nations by the archangel Michael. History has shown us that neither of these events took place. Antiochus' death was caused by disease and occurred not in Israel, but in an area closer to modern day Iran.⁴ As we see Jesus' own ministry heavily weighted on by the rule of Rome, it appears obvious that neither did Michael "vindicate" the Israelites

from their life under the thumb of foreign rule. What are we left with in this occasion? We have tangible, provable evidence that the author is incorrect in his assertion, and yet we see the text still contains this so-called prophecy. To some, this very idea would mean we need to completely write the book of Daniel out of our text all together. To others again, this shakes their ideologies of the text. To me though, it simply means the author was in fact, a human being. So what can we offer ourselves and others in the realm of the *inerrancy* of the text?

Inerrancy - an alternative view

As we have shown, there are blatant contradictions and mistakes in the text. For some, the simple fact that I have written this will make them print this document just so they can burn it in a holy fire. For others, it may shake their faith to the core to realize that the book they hold in such a high regard has errors in it. For me, it does neither. As I said before, I believe it to be a beautiful expression of the Father's love and devotion to His children that He allowed His story to be penned by human fallibility, and allowed the mistakes without wiping us off the face of the earth. I would like to offer an alternative to classical inerrancy just as I have with classical inspiration. Rather than looking at the text itself as inerrant, I believe we could look at its *intent* as inerrant. What do I mean by this? Let's take our two cases of the last supper and the prophecy of the author of Daniel and look at their intent rather than their literal writing. The intent of the authors of the synoptic gospels as well as the intent of John's letter was not to have an historically perfect document in all its accounts, but rather to have a book that chronicled the man who had forever changed the face of their universe (as well as our own). In that intent, the stories of the last supper mean something different to each author, and whether or not their chronology was absolutely perfectly accurate or not, their private interpretation of the events of that night comes through in their writings. The author of Daniel possibly wanted to offer a ray of hope to a people who had been stuck under the authoritarian rule of other nations for most of their recorded existence. Is it wrong to offer hope, even when that hope is based on "false prophecy?" Certainly some might think so, but I would have to say no, especially when that hope is a mere glimmer of what was really coming - the person of Jesus Christ.

Infallibility - the classic view

Inerrancy and *infallibility* often get lumped together as synonyms and they do carry a bit of the same connotation, however there is a meaning of *infallible* held by some that should be addressed in this essay. The classic view of the *infallibility* of scripture is that scripture itself is free of error (*inerrant*) and therefore is exempt from liability to any perceived error in its judgments or assumptions. So while *inerrancy* speaks to the content of the text, *infallibility*

would speak to the text's exemption from examination in the light of scientific and historical findings. As we have shown, there are known historical issues among the texts. *Infallibility* would say that these *perceived errors* are not errors, and that history is what is incorrect. This is a dangerous game for us to play with the text. Largely because I believe this to be the major problem the world at large has with the church as a whole. We have rejected tangible proof in the protection of perfection in our text. Again, mostly because there was a time when we needed freedom from religious hierarchy, but that freedom should not have come at the expense of academia. Martin Luther said some pretty astounding things about reason that seemed to help create a new hierarchy, the hierarchy of scripture, during the reformation. Luther was a man who did what needed to be done, but as with anyone, we should take *all* his teachings lightly!

“Reason is the Devil’s greatest whore; by nature and manner of being she is a noxious whore; she is a prostitute, the Devil’s appointed whore; whore eaten by scab and leprosy who ought to be trodden under foot and destroyed, she and her wisdom... Throw dung in her face to make her ugly. She is and she ought to be drowned in baptism... She would deserve, the wretch, to be banished to the filthiest place in the house, to the closets.”⁵

What are we to do with a quote like that? Throw it out? Use it as fodder to fuel the fire of the modern churches' attack on scholarly pursuits? Well, firstly we don't know Luther's intent, and just as we can only speculate about the author of the scripture text and his or her intent, we can speculate about Luther. Certainly a man who was educated enough to know that there was something wrong with the status quo and begin offering the text to the common people would not believe no one but himself should be educated? I don't believe Luther was attacking thinking things through logically. I believe him to be referring to trying to reason out the mystery of Christ. To that end, I agree with him. Paul continually referred to the mystery of Christ as something to which he only had a glimpse (for now we know in part), and if the man who spent the first years of his ministry alone with Christ still only knew a glimpse, I'm comfortable with their being an *unknown* aspect to our faith, one that we should never try to reason out. I'm also quite comfortable though with the aspects of our faith that can be researched being researched, and those that can be analyzed being analyzed, and those that should be taught, being taught. We are instructed to *study to show ourselves approved* and I believe that to be one of the great joys of life in the realm of faith. That as we study, we will see we are approved! Again, we are told in John to *know and believe*. I believe that knowing (relational understanding which leads to experiential knowledge) is the doorway to belief. Following Anselm and Barth can we not say that “faith seeks understanding”, i.e., it is of the nature of faith to seek to understand, and thus “to know?”. What do I mean by this? When we think about faith and belief in the realm of human relationship, we see a different picture than what has typically been offered us by religion.

Religion would tell us that faith is necessary to know God, that we must *believe* in the unseen to guarantee our relational standing. However, I believe this to be backwards. I believe the phrase *know and believe* to be sequential. Once we know someone, we believe in them. Once we have relationship with someone, we have faith in them. I have absolute faith in my wife because we are in relationship. I don't have faith that we will have relationship, otherwise we would not be married!

What does all this mean for *infallibility* though? We have placed the whole of our *faith* in the *infallibility* of the text. So much so, that if any portion of scripture were proved incorrect in the slightest, we will at best offer some regurgitated response aimed at talking circles around the issue at hand, and at worst, we will divorce ourselves completely from scholarly opinion, from historical fact, from scientific findings, and from tangible evidence. When we do this, we are no longer *in this world but not of it*, rather we are *so heavenly minded we're no earthly good*. The sciences and the works of men who devote their lives to the pursuit of truth are things to be celebrated, not thrown out if they don't confirm our own private assumptions of the text. As we've seen in this essay thus far, the text contains problematic parts. And as we've discussed already, the idea that the text *must* be wholly inspired, inerrant and infallible is of recent invention.

Infallibility - an alternative view

What can we offer as an alternative view to the *infallibility* of the text? Just as we have done with *inerrancy*, I believe we can take an approach of looking at the intent of the text rather than its current transliteration in our favorite English translation. One thing I love to do is read different versions of the same text. Often times, this yields a much richer understanding to the heart of the author (lost as it may be to time) and a fuller picture of the *inspiration* the Spirit played for them. One of my favorites is from Ephesians where the Apostle is addressing the church regarding the effectual work of Christ. In Eph 1, Paul offers us a picture of what he believes the Spirit has revealed to him for his ministry. In the CEB v 9 reads - *God revealed his hidden design to us, which is according to his goodwill and the plan that he intended to accomplish through his Son* The secret plan? This would be the *intent* of the working of the Father, Son, Spirit, and we could say the *intent* of the text itself. And what is that secret? Various translations offer us an amazing picture of the *intent*. The following verses tell us what Paul considers to be the very purpose of the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

CEB v10 - *This is what God planned for the climax of all times: to bring all things together in Christ, the things in heaven along with the things on earth.*

JBP v10 - *he purposes in his sovereign will that all human history shall be consummated in Christ, that everything that exists in Heaven or earth shall find its perfection and fulfilment in him.*

MES v10 - *He set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth.*

These three texts (others offer a beautiful picture as well) give us a glimpse into the heart of the author about the secret of God's plan. However, when we hold to an idea that there must be one *infallible* text, we often throw out any other rendition of the text as heretical. In certain circles this is in favor of the King James translation of the text, a document argued to have thousands of clerical, historical and translational errors in it. Again, for some this might cause a very real crisis of faith. For those that have their faith completely founded on the *inerrancy, inspiration and infallibility* of the text, it most likely needs to be shaken. Jesus is the substance of our faith, not the Bible. The Bible is a beautiful book full of history, myth, metaphor, correctness, error, contradiction, mystery, and truth. It however never makes the claim that it is the substance of our faith. The claims made about the text are never made by the text itself; in fact, the text has often reserved these claims for one person, Jesus Christ, the living word.

The Self Interpreting Text

Rather than offering a "classical view" and an "alternative view" regarding the idea that the text is self interpreting, I thought to use an example that might be too outlandish for some, but will serve the purpose of getting the point across. Imagine if you will, a Martian (or being from some other planet) arriving on earth. That being speaks no English or any language of human beings, and it visits one of our libraries. Now, the alien picks up three books; *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (or *philosopher's if it has arrived in London*), Homer's *the Iliad*, and one it spots titled *The Holy Bible*. Suppose the being begins to read through *Harry Potter*, and is trying to learn the English language. Well, if our thought of self-interpretation applies to the book, then this being ought to be able to draw an accurate picture of what a broom looks like, or what a wand is, or what a sorting hat might be. Suppose then that it moves on to *the Iliad*. The character of the Muse appears on the page, and the text, self-interpreting as it is, lets this being know that a muse is a goddess (whatever that is) that *inspires* humans to create, learn and grow. Finally, this being moves on to the *Holy Bible*, and using its new found knowledge begins to interpret the text in light of itself. I'm sure we are already seeing problems with this idea. Firstly, the alien knows

no English, so it is just putting together symbols and phrases, each of which do not give definition to themselves. Seeing a phrase like *light of the world* to a being that even knew some English may cause that being to believe that Jesus was the sun! But if that being were to look deeper, to the language in which the book were penned, or speak with the author, it may get a better picture. And thus, study.

I was discussing the need for (as close as we can get to) original languages with a friend of mine one day, and why I commonly look to the Greek and Hebrew and, as often as possible, to Aramaic transliterations as well as scholarly opinions of the text. She thought this to be a wasted pursuit, because the bible just interprets itself. My reply was that when we read a book like *Harry Potter* or *The Iliad*, we refer back to our own education in the defining of the text. Because we speak English and have learned what most words are, we don't need to sit with a dictionary and reference it each time Harry picks up his broom to see what a broom is. Similarly, we don't need to refer to what a cave might be when reading *The Iliad*, our paradigm would determine that we see it as a dank, dark hole, either in a mountain or some hill. Has the text defined this or did our paradigm define it? Our paradigm has defined it, and this is what we must understand about the text of the scriptures. We are constantly trying to define the text within the paradigm of 21st century Western thought. It is almost as though we see Jesus as a white American man with straight brown hair and blue eyes who would fit in most American businesses rather than as a pre-1st century Jew, likely browned by the middle-eastern sun, with curly hair and dark eyes who would most likely be thrown out of most American businesses! N.T. Wright has said - "*If we are going to understand Jesus, it's vital to grasp the difference between his world and ours.*"⁶ We could say it this way; if we wish to know Jesus in our world, we need to know Him in His. Our paradigm must be adjusted to see what the intent of the text is. In looking at societal context, historical context, things like the economic and political climate, we see a different picture of things like the parables, the reasons for dietary laws, certain sexual laws etc. But if we stick with our current paradigm, we end up where we are today, creating invisible lines of *we* and *they* whenever *we* have the correct interpretation and *they* do not.

I have seen it written that we need not change our paradigms, and to that I must ask the following questions. Why then do we disallow slavery (Exodus 21)? Why do we imprison the rapist (Deut 22)? Why allow women to work - or even speak at all (1 Tim 2)? Why, because our paradigms change as we learn new things about the earth, the value of humanity, the intent of the author, and the meaning of the text. I thank God for the scholarly world, without it, we would still live in a flat world with justified slavery, male-centered society (which we largely still have admittedly), where marrying 12 year olds is the norm, multiple wives are the norm, and rape is sanctioned just as openly as beating our servants.

Is all of this a problem for our faith? It may be for some, but it certainly doesn't need to be. I'd like to offer an opinion on our incessant need for a perfect text and what we can do about it if we wish to move forward with faith just as we have with science and academia.

The Mimetic Need for Perfection

René Girard has offered an astounding work in his mimetic theory. Anyone interested should certainly read his material. The idea he sets forth is something like what we would call *keeping up with the Joneses*. We likely all understand this metaphor. The need to have what others have causes us to live in ways that keep us in constant competition with one another to have the nicest house, the newest car, the most up to date technology, etc. This mimetic desire drives us to do things we may not normally be willing to do. I don't see this as all bad, if mimetic desire is the only thing that would make someone preach the risen Christ, then as Paul said *whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached and in that I rejoice*. However the desire is there nonetheless. It has created, in Girard's terminology, *interdividual* beings. We rely on others' progression and growth before we begin our own. The Bible would not argue with this assumption. There are a few verses that point to this very idea. 2 Cor 10:12 - *For we dare not make ourselves of the number; or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise*, and 2 Cor 3:18 - *But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord*. Even the Ten Commandments contain warnings against mimetic desire in our lives. The author of Corinthians saw both good and bad fruits of mimetic desire. *Comparing ourselves among ourselves we are not wise* would say that in seeing others, and lusting for their title, goods, position etc. we make ourselves unwise. *Beholding...we are changed* - I have heard this rendered *beholding is becoming* which speaks perfectly to the idea of mimetic desire and the issue at hand.

Because we are interdividual beings, often plagued by mimetic desire in its negative expression, we *need* a perfect text. This is no more evident than with the constitution of the United States. The sheer amount of manpower and money that is devoted yearly to interpreting this document is staggering. Why? Because even in this case, we need something perfect to define us. And why do we need perfection? I believe it is because we are subconsciously committed to this mimetic desire. If our text is imperfect, it means that we ourselves are imperfect. But if our text remains perfect in every way, we are able to impose perfection upon ourselves as well. If there is in fact a *perfect* interpretation of the text then *we* are those who have it and *they* are those who don't. And if *they* don't and *we* do, *we* are free to use the text as the means by which we (often violently)

enforce our own interpretation of the text upon *them*. We see this in the US constitution for certain, but even more devastatingly in the text of the Bible. When the text is perfect in all its assumptions, we have the means necessary to attack the heretic, to bomb the infidel, to burn the woman who speaks out of line at the stake, to formulate legislation that allows for the murder and torture of certain sects of God's children because of their sexual preference, and to have a Zionistic approach to our politics. Again, those are all topics that could have their own books and essays devoted to them, indeed they do, but we are dealing with the Bible.

Conclusion

What we must learn to understand is that there is no belief outlined in the text that would *demand* we believe the text to be 100% inspired, 100% inerrant, or 100% infallible. In fact, the text itself would declare otherwise. It is said of Jesus that "nothing did He speak except in parables" and yet the parabolic text is often taken as literal, as though the author knew nothing of what they spoke. So which is it? Is the text 100% inspired, or should we stop taking the parables to be literal? It cannot be both, it must be one or the other.

Many would like to say that if *any* of the text is fallible, errant, or not inspired, then *none* of it is. This of course is foolishness, and it reeks of what we spoke of earlier in regards to the mimetic theory. This is how we tend to live our lives. If something or someone is proven to be wrong in *any* thing they do, say, teach, etc. then that person becomes wrong in *every* thing they do. This is the very reason for church hopping in the Christian world. We hear a pastor say something incorrect, or we see him or her do something that demonstrates their fallibility, and it becomes too much for us to handle, so we go to the next place, wherein we feel we will find that inerrant position once again. We project our opinion of the text onto the men who teach it, and rather than understanding and allowing them to be human, we demand, however subconsciously, that they too be infallible. And so the cycle begins again. The person becomes our scapegoat when things don't go the way we think they should - all because they are fallible, and we can prove them to be so, nearly every time using the text to back our opinion of the person - either positive or negative.

If we can however begin to break out of the framework of the 100% inerrant, inspired, infallible text, we can most likely begin to see a bigger event playing out before us. Am I suggesting that we throw out the text? Absolutely not, however I am suggesting that we throw out our view of an ancient group of historical documents, biographical sketches, and metaphorical stories as 100% literal, and begin to move forward with a clearer vision of what the text has to offer. Namely, a marvelous vision of the once-for-all delivery of the kingdom of heaven to the earth by the

Father's Eternal Son, the utter reversal of all things relating to the fall of man, and the subsequent ascension of the Son of Man to be seated at the right hand of the Father. There is no need for pages on paper to be inerrant when the one who is inerrant has revealed Himself to be the very topic the text is making an attempt at (and sometimes miserably failing, other times doing a pretty good job at) describing. If we see the text as a sketch written by fallible humans, we need not become violent when others would violate *our* interpretation of the text, but will begin to learn from one another's renditions.

Where to go from here? Often times when we address issues such as these, our mind begins to run away with us. *If it isn't inerrant, or infallible, or inspired all the time how can I trust ANY of it?* Is probably the first question to come to mind. Whenever portions of the text seem to be revealing a different picture of the Father than the Abba Jesus revealed Him to be, we should begin to take note of those places. And in those cases, we often need to adjust our paradigm and see the text through 1st century eyes. Other times we may need to consult scholarly opinion on the matter, and other times we may simply need to look at the person of Christ. We may debate this issue, but there is nothing Jesus did more than teach. And there is nothing He taught more than the Father and His kingdom. This is theology is it not? To reveal the Father, to reveal the Kingdom at hand, and to show the nature of the Triune Godhead? In those instances when it would seem that there is an issue, I believe we can often times revert as a default to the Abba of Jesus and how He would respond to the situation. If it doesn't confirm who Jesus revealed the Father to be, then there is good chance it could be something simply coming through the minds of men trying to work out the divine in human understanding.

One of my favorite terminologies is *shelve it*. I do this often with troublesome texts. I simply shelve them. I don't necessarily worry about whether or not they mean this-or-that, I put them away in my mind. Often times something is revealed that sheds new light on the subject, and often times there is simply no answer to be found. This is part of the mystery, the unknown. We should be comfortable with the unknown. It shouldn't frighten us to have to answer to someone *I don't know*, yet it does. I too am guilty of this, and I'm learning more and more that there are just areas of scripture, just as in life, where there is no answer to the question of *why?*

So, do we have a text that is 100% inerrant, inspired and infallible? And are we required to hold to those beliefs? I don't believe so. However, I do believe the intent of the text to be inspired when its intent is to reveal the Abba of Jesus. I believe the intent of the text to be infallible when its intent is to reveal the risen Savior, and I believe the intent of the text to be inerrant when its intent is to reveal the truth of the Father's love for all His children.

1 Message to me, January 23, 2014

2 What the Facebook? : Posts from the Edge of Christendom (Lancaster: JLD Press, 2014), post of April 25.

3 Borg, Marcus J.; Wright, N. T. (2009-04-25). The Meaning of Jesus (Plus) (Kindle Location 177). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

4 Encyclopedia Britannica "Antiochus IV Epihanes"

5 Martin Luther, Works, Erlangen Edition v. 16, pp. 142-148.

6 NT Wright *Simply Jesus* Harper One Publishers