

Inspiration or Exasperation

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Who Speaks for God?

For Bible students, the subject of inspiration can be a big can of worms. Almost every "religious argument" is founded on the concept of inspiration, even though each person debating may be completely unaware of it. Every church has taken a position on this topic even though they may not inform members about it.

They rarely discuss the topic of inspiration from the pulpit because understanding it can be difficult – and the consequences can be devastating.

This topic is often considered too scholarly for the average churchgoer, so it remains a mystery, cloaked in darkness, and not considered "essential for salvation." I have found that most people have not considered the topic of inspiration very carefully.

This seems strange since this topic is one of *the* pivotal presuppositions for all religions. Millions have fought and died defending the doctrines that originated from ideas about inspiration. You, the reader, may be asking, "Why is the topic of inspiration such a big deal? Do I really need to know about this?"

What is Inspiration?

By definition, inspiration is the process by which God speaks to a person revealing information that is otherwise unknown and/or unavailable. For example, God told Noah to build a big boat because He was going to send a global flood and destroy the inhabitants of the Earth. God even gave Noah the dimensions of the boat. So, using the definition just given for inspiration, we can say, "God inspired Noah to build a big boat." Without sounding silly, the reader should understand that the boat itself was not inspired, instead God inspired Noah, its builder.

Inspired people are not necessarily righteous people. God speaks to corrupt people, too. For example, God spoke to Cain after he murdered Able, to Balaam as he prepared to curse Israel, and to Saul (Paul) as he traveled toward Damascus to persecute Christians. God also revealed things to kings (Saul, Nebuchadnezzar and Belteshazzar), although they were obviously unrighteous men?

The Bible is clear, God has directly spoken to many people since He created Adam and Eve. However, the last of the Bible writers died about A.D. 100. Has God spoken since? Does God still speak to people? Are there inspired people living today? And if so, who are they and how should we respond to the things they say?

Inspiration and TV

As we listen to religious broadcasting, we often hear someone say, "The Lord showed me . . ." or "The Lord impressed me . . ." or "The Lord spoke to me and said . . ." We need to examine these statements because such statements present three problems. However, these problems are surmountable if you give them some careful thought:

"The Lord spoke to me . . ."

If the Lord truly speaks to a person who appears on TV and they say "such and such," how can anyone verify that the revelation is from God? If "The Word of the Lord" truly comes down from On-High and if God really did say "such and such," then who is man that he should argue with God? Mortals are subject to Almighty God – end of discussion. So, the problem is, how can a person verify that God *actually spoke* to that TV evangelist or anyone else, for that matter? No one can independently review or investigate the dream of another person.

No one can even confirm that the individual had a dream or if they actually heard from God. For many reasons, people make all kinds of claims – some of which really make God angry. (Ezekiel 13) So, what should a thoughtful person do? I recommend that a person compare the contents of the revelation that purports to be from God with his own understanding of the Bible. I call this type of review "fruit inspection," for Jesus said, "**You will know them by their fruits . . .**" (Matthew 7:16 NRSV)

Keep in mind that deciding whether the fruit is good or bad is not always easy, especially over a short time. Truth is eternal and Bible students do not need to make up their minds in 30 minutes about what is truth.

There are two key points each of us need to remember: First, the listener trying to discern truth should have a working knowledge of the Bible. This is where so many good people fail. They have not read or studied their Bibles. Therefore, the standard measure for what they hear is: "Does it sound right?" or "Does it sound good?"

Unfortunately, this can lead to wrong conclusions. Second, truth has many dimensions. In other words, our concept of truth is based on our experiences of what we have observed in the past to be true. People may maintain that certain elements on a specific topic are true. However, that does not necessarily mean we know all the truth regarding that topic, especially as God knows truth.

For example, a child is taught from a very early age to not touch a fire. The only truth about the fire the child then knows is the word "no." Later, children learn that fires are hot and if they touch the flame, they will get burned. Although the truth "hand in fire means hand gets burned" exists, there is much more children can learn about the physiology of burning their hands. In this case, truth is just an expansion of what has been previously understood or is it? An adult knows that it is possible to pass a hand through the flame without burning it.

In fact, sometimes we even snuff out a candle by covering the flame with our fingers. So, is the child's truth of "hand in fire means hand gets burned" true or false? From the child's perspective, it is absolutely true. The problem that we must grapple with is, "are we willing to challenge

elements we have previously considered to be true to obtain a more complete understanding of truth?"

To challenge our previous concepts of truth, we have to keep an open mind. An open mind does not mean that everything we regard as truth is still negotiable. Rather, an open mind means we are willing to challenge ourselves and consider new perspectives that offer better answers to questions that have risen from our personal quest for truth. (If a person has no quest for truth, then good answers without appropriate questions is like stumbling into rare treasure and not realizing what it is.)

"The Lord directed me to . . ."

The second problem dealing with inspiration goes in a different direction. For example, some people claim the Lord opened this or that door of financial opportunity and as a result, they are now better off than ever before. But what about the rest of the world's population who seeks and/or needs God's counsel? People ask, "Why doesn't God speak to us in the same way? Why doesn't He bless us similarly?" Claims like these make God appear to have "favorites."

People who struggle to meet life's necessities wonder why God does not direct them to alleviate their suffering. They stumble around in darkness asking why God is silent regarding their needs, while He is revealing things to person X that makes them successful.

I have observed that many Christians who make claims that they are receiving God's blessings are in the flow of some successful venture and are happy to give God credit for their good fortune. (Even a selfish heart can rejoice at good fortune and two minutes later, entirely forget the Giver. Check out the story in Luke 17:12-19.)

Conversely, how many people give God credit for their failures? Does God allow a man to experience tragedy to help them grow spiritually so He might use that person more effectively? Remember Joseph in prison? Friends, prosperity theology is bankrupt. Sometimes, the prosperity attributed to God is false glory.

Remember Jimmy Bakker and the PTL empire? After diligent Bible study while in prison, even Jimmy Bakker now admits the error of his ways and denounces prosperity theology. Everyone knows many factors go into the success of any venture – a window of opportunity, talent, diligence and perseverance, just to name a few. God does financially enable and bless people, but not always in the same way – to some people He gives one talent and to others, He gives five!

But, and this is an emphatic point, God requires accountability. Be faithful to God and use what He has given you. It seems very paradoxical for preachers to exalt material prosperity yet Jesus said, ". . . **It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.**" (Matthew 19:24) So, why would God promise to bless everyone with riches if it almost always prevents them from going to Heaven?

My point with these claims of inspiration is that people can (and should) give glory to God for whatever blessings they receive. However, we should also understand the accountability that comes with God's blessings. Be on the alert for the deceitful and selfish heart! Here is a sublime truth: God does not pour out material blessings for self-centered use and because of this, claims about God's actions should be thoughtfully considered.

"God told me to tell you . . . "

The third element of inspiration is far more troublesome than the previous two I have mentioned. Let us suppose a man claims the Lord spoke to him in a vision and in this vision, the Lord said every person must do "such and such." In this setting, our understanding of inspiration becomes crucial. Let me ask a few questions to help you get a better perspective of the problem. Must we believe that God spoke to *him* and should we obey the message? Does the "vision" make *the messenger* authoritative?

Does one vision mean the messenger represents "the voice of God" from now on? Will God condemn us if we refuse or disagree with what the messenger said? As you can see, the can of worms has now been opened. Before we pour the contents of the can out, let us consider the problem of inspiration from a larger perspective.

Church Systems

The Roman Catholic Church has a broad definition for inspiration and it derives ecclesiastical authority (e.g., matters concerning salvation) from many sources, including the Bible (along with the apocryphal books), administrative decisions made throughout past ages (tradition) and certain declarations made by popes. Muslims and Jews also draw from a wide range of sources to derive ecclesiastical authority.

In the Muslim's case, they follow the writings of Moses, Mohammed and other sacred writers, which are included in the Koran. Muslims also accept the moral teachings of Jesus and other prophets, but they consider Mohammed the *last* and greatest of God's prophets. Because of this, they believe Mohammed's writings eclipse lesser or earlier writings by other prophets, including Jesus.

Jews, on the other hand, accept the Torah (first five books of the Old Testament), the Talmud (a compilation of works that includes the Mishnah (oral teachings), and the Gemara (discussions on the Mishnah). Besides the Talmud, Jews also accept the writings of Old Testament prophets and certain rabbis who have lived at various times throughout the centuries as ecclesiastical authority. Eastern religions also have broad definitions for religious authority that include the writings of Buddha and other "holy men" as revealers of truth.

Protestants have mixed views regarding the topic of spiritual authority. Fundamentalists are defined as those who stand on the Bible and take a very literal view of the Bible (as it reads) for matters concerning the knowledge and worship of God. However, in practice, many churches are not fundamental.

For example, Christian Scientists regard Mary Baker Eddy as an inspired writer who explained the Scriptures. Because of this "gift," Christian Scientists consider her writings to have the authority to confirm or reject what the Bible means or does not mean. Similarly, Mormons regard Joseph Smith as an inspired writer, Seventh-day Adventists regard Ellen White as an inspired writer and Jehovah Witnesses regard Charles T. Russell's translation of the Scriptures as the only correct version.

Mainstream Protestant churches such as Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans and Presbyterians claim to stand on the Bible for their church authority, but in practice the strong influences of the founding fathers and the attitudes or beliefs of current administrators and popular political forces can and do supersede the plainest teachings of the Bible.

As you can see, when a church group considers someone (perhaps one of its founders) to be inspired, a significant change in doctrine becomes almost impossible. Why? Because to allow change would violate statements made by "inspiration." Consequently, change within a particular denomination is very rare because the denomination believes that God does not change.

In recent times, the Christian press has stated that the major doctrinal changes within the World-wide Church of God (Armstrong) is a miracle. Instead of a miracle, what I believe we have seen is a group of men taking over the churches' administration in an attempt to create a new identity for the church. The "World-wide Church of God" today does not represent the same organization of years gone by. Yes, a group of people remain who lay claim to the name, but they do not hold to the same core doctrines that Herbert W. Armstrong (the founder) established.

Since his death in 1986, leaders have completely revamped church doctrine and put new doctrines before the congregations with a "take it or leave it" mandate. As a result, the World-wide Church of God has less than half the membership it did when Armstrong died. Time will tell if the "new and improved" church will endure.

Where do We Turn?

As you can observe from this brief review on church authority, the topic of inspiration is not a simple matter. It can have profound dimensions. When a person seeks after truth about God, to whom does he or she listen? For example, consider the following hypothetical argument:

A Jew says to a Protestant: "God declared that He requires circumcision of all males as an everlasting covenant. (See Genesis 17:11-13.) Therefore, if we are to submit to the commands of Almighty God for salvation, we believe we must circumcise all males. Yet, Christians deny that circumcision is necessary for salvation. By what authority do you say that circumcision is unnecessary?"

The Protestant responds: "We are no longer under the binding claims of the covenant given to Abraham. We are under a new covenant that is based on faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, on

the authority of the writings of the Apostle Paul, we believe that the issue of circumcision has no bearing on whether one is saved or not." (Acts 15, 1 Corinthians 7:19; Galatians 5:6)

The Jew says: "Who is Paul that he should speak for God? Did God revoke the everlasting covenant given to Abraham? Even Paul says that God's calling cannot be revoked. (Romans 11:29) Did God reveal to one man of dubious character certain information showing that the everlasting covenant of circumcision is no longer valid? What evidence do you have to prove that Paul was speaking for God? What evidence do you have that God has changed an everlasting covenant? Isn't this a contradiction in terms? How can something everlasting not be everlasting?"

The Protestant responds: "God established a new covenant based on Christ. This new covenant voids the everlasting covenant given to Abraham because salvation comes through Jesus – not through observing rites or rituals. In other words, we are no longer under the Abrahamic covenant. The basis for our claim is found in Paul's writings."

The Jew responds: "We cannot accept the testimony of Paul as true. Isaiah 8:20 (KJV) says, **"To the law [of Moses] and to the testimony [within the Ark of the Covenant]: If they speak not according to this word, it is because they have no light in them."** Old truth is always true. Truth is eternal. No one displaces truth with new truth. If Paul spoke the truth, then his views would harmonize with the testimony of God that Moses transcribed."

The Protestant responds: "I believe the testimony of Paul to be from God. I believe sufficient evidence exists in the New Testament to confirm that God revealed a new covenant to him. Based on Paul's inspiration, I do not see any religious value in circumcision. Salvation comes by faith – not by works. Salvation is only possible through Jesus Christ."

The Jew responds: "I believe the testimony of Moses to be true. I believe sufficient evidence exists to confirm that God stands by the everlasting covenant given to Abraham. On the authority of Genesis 17:12, I have no choice but to observe the command of God to circumcise male babies on the eighth day. We cannot accept the teachings of Jesus Christ, nor can we accept Him as Messiah since He taught doctrines that are contrary to what God had previously spoken."

Which Authority?

The reader should begin to grasp the point in this dialog. No possible reconciliation can exist on the issue of circumcision between the Jew and Gentile. The authorities quoted stand in apparent contradiction. Therefore, no agreement is possible. For this reason the world is religiously divided.

Are we locked in or out of truth by simply respecting the authority that we were introduced to as a child? By this I mean, if a person is born a Catholic, the chances are better than 95% that he will die a Catholic. He will grow up respecting (essentially) the ecclesiastical authorities that govern the Catholic Church.

He may not understand the authorities, but they will nevertheless claim his loyalties. Understand that the same is true for Muslims, Jews, Protestants, Hindus and all others. Less than 5% of people change religion! Said another way, less than 5% of the world's population change religious authorities. What does this say of man, religion and our preconceptions?

After studying the matter of inspiration for a season, I am convinced of the following:

1. Truth is eternal – even though no one has fully understood it.
2. God, at times, changes His plans according to man's behavior.
3. At anytime, God gives sufficient evidence to confirm the essentials of His will.

A Parable

I hope the following parable shows the progressive nature of truth as it operates through inspiration. Suppose you are blindfolded and taken by the hand to a stage within a totally dark auditorium filled with hundreds of silent people. The blindfold is removed, but you cannot see or hear anything. Your guide shines a narrow beam of light to your left and you see three people sitting in the light. Then, he shines the spotlight toward the back of the auditorium and you see two people sitting in their chairs.

Last, he shines the spotlight toward the right of the auditorium and you see one person sitting there. The blindfold is then replaced, and as you exit the room, your guide says that you should reveal everything you experienced and saw. As you begin to tell others of this unique experience, some call you "inspired" because you spoke about things that *God revealed*, things otherwise unknown.

Consider the meaning of the parable. God chooses very common people to become His servants. In Paul's case, the revelation experience was so lifelike that he could not tell whether he remained "in the body" or whether he was taken "out of the body." (See 2 Corinthians 12:2.) On the other hand, John concluded he was taken "out of the body" during his vision on Patmos. (Revelation 4:2) The point here is that God reveals wonderful things to common people. He shines a *spotlight* on some part of truth.

When the vision ends, the messenger begins to tell what he saw and heard. Even more, the prophet integrates the *revealed* information with what he already knows about God's truth (he conceptually connects what he saw with what he knows).

But, every inspired person's view of truth is limited. (In the parable, the messenger was shown only six people, but remember, the auditorium was full of people.) Do not forget, Paul said, "**For we know in part and we prophesy in part.**" (1 Corinthians 13:9) God gives one revelation and then perhaps, a few hundred years pass before God reveals more; however, this time He may shine the spotlight so the next prophet sees only things *not seen* before.

Thus, more truth about the contents of the room is revealed. Centuries go by and God continues this process – ever revealing more about the contents of the room. Thus, the truth about the contents of the room continues to unfold at God's discretion.

Before Jesus returns, God will reveal and connect the "contents of the room" to the 144,000. Continuing the parable, God will take the 144,000 into the same room of truth and God will flip on the ceiling lights so they can see and understand the WHOLE truth about the contents of the room.

The 144,000 will quickly see the contents of the room and powerfully proclaim the WHOLE truth to a confused world. The neat thing about this is that those who love truth and have studied their Bible diligently will recognize the truth when the 144,000 proclaim it and be able to connect the dots.

Five Points

This simple parable teaches five important things about God, truth, inspiration and man. First, man cannot see more truth than God wants to reveal at any given time. Second, each prophet receives only a partial view of God's truths. So, the testimony of any one prophet will be incomplete until the 144,000 appear. Third, truth is additive. Therefore, a person must take into account all that has been written about truth, line upon line and precept upon precept, to understand what God has revealed and *what was not* revealed.

This is a sticky point because it is easy to assume that everything an inspired person writes is inspired! Fourth, the final generation on Earth will hear the whole truth (as it relates to the fulfillment of the plan of salvation) because God will reveal the contents of truth to His servants the prophets, the 144,000. They will powerfully announce the *everlasting* gospel to the world. Last, this parable teaches that new light is consistent with previous light. However, this parable also shows how more light can oppose ideas that people previously thought to be true. Consider the following points:

The first prophet only saw six people in the room and since many people believed his testimony, they formed a church called, "The Church of Six People." But later, another prophet testifies that he saw 12 people in the room. Consequently, some people combined the report of each prophet and concluded there must be 18 people in the room.

So, they formed a church called, "The Church of 18 People." However, other Bible students concluded, based on the "inspiration" the prophets received, that there were 12 people in the room. They believed there were 12 people because they thought the second prophet saw the *same* six people the first prophet saw, and they believed the second prophet was shown just six *new* people. This last group formed a church called, "The Church of 12 People."

As you can see, a significant amount of diversity remains over the sightings of the prophets. Obviously, the information gleaned by the prophets was incomplete and therefore, subject to a certain amount of ambiguity. (Unfortunately, each church was certain *they* had the truth on the

contents in the room.)

When the 144,000 see the entire room lit up, they will report that 1,000 people are sitting in the room! Their report will anger the churches who insist that "their inerrant prophet" saw fewer people in the room. However, a few people in each church, those who understood from the beginning that each prophet's report is incomplete, will rejoice to learn that the room is full of people. What will happen to these people who understand the light of truth?

The individuals who maintain that 1,000 people were in the room will be thrown out of their churches for believing such foolishness.

I hope from this parable that you can see how important a proper understanding of inspiration is to Bible study. The contents of truth, as revealed later by additional light will be consistent with the contents of previous light, if one is willing to sort through the details and find the harmony.

This is a point where so many people get confused: A Bible student needs to be diligent in studying the Scriptures to distinguish between what is truth and what people call truth.

Inconsistencies Not a Stumbling Stone

This writer rejects the notion that God *verbally* inspired the Bible. The proponents of verbal inspiration maintain that the writers of the Bible wrote God's words as He spoke them. Instead, I believe they used their own words to describe things that God revealed to them. Bible students call this view of inspiration plenary inspiration, which means God enables the writer to express his views in his own words. This concept of inspiration helps to explain many inconsistencies found in the Bible.

For example, Matthew describes an incident when Jesus met two men possessed by demons after He and His disciples sailed across the lake to the region of the Gadarenes. Jesus commanded the demons to come out of the two men and as a result, the demons entered a large herd of pigs. The pigs then ran into the sea and drowned. (See Matthew 28:8.) However, Matthew's description is inconsistent with two other gospel writers who wrote that there was only one man and not two! (See Mark 5:2 and Luke 8:27.)

You may say, what difference does it make if there is one man or two? Very little as far as the story goes. However, this tiny point demonstrates that Bible writers had the freedom to say what they thought or remembered. Any student of the four gospels knows there are many discrepancies between the gospels.

This should not be a problem if you correctly understand the properties of inspiration. For me, these types of discrepancies make Bible study interesting. What a delight to solve a mystery and find the truth!

Bible writers display a large latitude in writing. Some express their own opinions and clearly say so. (See 1 Corinthians 7:12.) In other places, Bible writers express their opinions and they do

not mention that it is their opinion! So, how can we distinguish between truth and that which people call truth? Before I address this question, I need to make another comment.

Any discussion on the subject of inspiration is likely to generate a dispute for two *human* reasons. First, some people reason that if God did not verbally inspire every word prophets wrote, then ordinary people could not distinguish between what God revealed and what He did not reveal.

In short, they claim that if the idea of plenary inspiration is true, then no one can *absolutely* separate truth from error. For these people, it seems inconceivable to believe that God expects us to separate truth from error when He knows He is always revealing truth.

However, the truth is, the human race only has partial truth anyway. Be warned: Plenary inspiration militates against those individuals who enjoy thinking they have intellectually surrounded themselves and understand the *WHOLE* truth. Some people see everything in black and white terms. So, be careful. The plenary process undermines "the proof-text" or "sound-bite" approach to truth.

Second, the subject of inspiration often causes debate because *very few* people honestly try to reconcile *all* that inspired people have written on any given topic. For instance, I have observed people discussing a specific Bible topic and someone will turn to certain texts and offer them as evidence to support his or her position.

Then, another person will dismiss those texts and offer other texts as proof supporting a different position. Think about this: How is it that texts from the *same* Bible militate against each other? No wonder critics declare the Bible a book of myths. Perhaps the better question should be, "How can a person ignore some texts and emphasize others when all texts have equal authority?" So, before you get into an aggressive discussion on some Bible topic, make sure you have considered the contribution of all relevant texts.

The \$64,000 Question

The important question is, how do you know when prophets are expressing their own opinion and/or when they are expressing a direct revelation from God? Answer: Looking for the harmony that comes from the sum of all the parts. For example, consider this text: **"In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment (vengeance KJV) of eternal fire."** (Jude 1:7)

I completely understand how people can read this text and conclude, *on the authority of Jude alone*, that the Sodomites and the Gomorrahites are burning in an eternal (endless) fire right now. If this were the only text in the Bible commenting on punishment and eternal fire, I would agree that Jude's comment about God's punishment for these two cities could support an eternal burning hell.

However, a thorough study of the Bible reveals that there are approximately 40 authors – each of whom have had the same experience called, "inspiration." So, to be sure you understand all that God has revealed about punishment and eternal fire, you need to examine all that Bible authors have written on this topic before reaching any conclusion.

Notice this text: "**They (the wicked) marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.**" (Revelation 20:9) Does John's statement conflict with Jude's?

Not if you place them side by side. John says that fire comes down from Heaven at the end of the 1,000 years and it *devours* the wicked. Because of this, I take Jude's comment to mean that God rained fire down upon Sodom and Gomorrah, which burned them up, and this event serves as an *example* of what God is going to do again. Individuals who receive the punishment from the final fire will be devoured and the *results* are eternal. So, the proof of truth has to be found in the harmony of the sum of its parts.

Sometimes, the harmony is difficult to find, but the contents of truth always align.

Moral Law and Inspiration

Religion always distorts the truth about God. Since sin damages human beings, it is inevitable that all religious structures eventually become corrupt. God is far more generous with the diversity of man than religion allows. Religion by its nature, takes a set of beliefs and creates an exclusive God.

Then people use their view of God to elevate *their* religion above all others and in the process, only separate themselves from each other. Some people claim there is only one God and that there are many different religions that serve Him. This is both true and not true.

Yes, there is one God, but every religion has its own view of God and what He expects. For example, the God of the Baptist commands different things than the God of the Catholic. The God of the Moslem commands different things than the God of the Jew, etc.

When it comes to right and wrong, you may notice that some commands from God apply specifically to a particular situation. For example, God commanded Noah to get on the ark, but for our generation, this is not possible. Another time, God commanded the Jews to offer a lamb on the altar of burnt offering, but in our time, it is not necessary if you believe New Testament writers. However, God has established universal, timeless commands for all humanity that we can call moral (basic) laws.

In one sentence the commands say, "Love the Lord with all your heart, mind and soul and your neighbor as yourself." To prevent degenerate man from distorting the true meaning of love, God defined the *results* of love, so human beings could test themselves to see if they meet His law of love.

God wrote the test on two enduring tablets of stone and the Bible calls them the Ten Commandments. A life of selfless (agape) love produces actions that are in harmony with God's law.

When people have applied righteous principles to their lives, noble and generous characters will result. God made sure that the Ten Commandments are not hard to understand. This is more than I can say for the thousands of laws that the United States' Congress has placed upon its citizens. (More than 11,000 laws govern each citizen in the United States!)

God's ten laws define moral truth in a profound and elegant way. People who are willing to express these ten principles *through love* glorify God.

When Jesus walked on the Earth, He was Truth Incarnate. He came to reveal more about God's character and will. The Jews did not accept Jesus as the Christ, the Promised One, nor did they believe His testimony for at least two reasons: Jesus said, "**This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.**" (John 3:19,20) Second, Jesus told the Jews, "**If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.**" (John 5:46)

The first text is self-explanatory, but the second text reveals something about human beings, religion and prophets. The Jews in Christ's day had exalted Moses to the place of God. They loved and thought they understood the teachings of Moses.

Of course, they would have denied that they worshiped Moses, for such a statement would be blasphemous, however, their actions revealed their concept of truth. God, taking the form of Jesus, stood right before them, but they did not recognize Him or the truth He presented.

The Jews had taken the writings of Moses, shrouded them with false ideas, which caused a false sense of righteousness and further closed their minds to the truth Jesus was trying to reveal. A terrible duo.

This brings us back to the point that truth is always larger than any one prophet. Truth is larger than all the prophets combined, because God and His truth are infinite. God has not yet revealed all of the truth – His truth is marching on. When God anoints the 144,000, He will reveal all the truth necessary for salvation during the calamitous end-time events. You can be sure of two things: First, new truth from God will be consistent with His moral law.

Second, like the prophets of old, the 144,000 will suffer greatly – the consequences for revealing more light to the people of the world will be costly. To be sure, God's people will suffer intensely for saying things contrary to the beliefs of religious people. Understand that their peers always regard inspired people as mere human beings. No one exalts prophets until people kill them or they die. (Even then, the world has forgotten many.)

Prophets suffer much because a big difference exists between God's truth and what people call truth, and this distinction often makes people very angry.

Notice the perpetual cycle. The devil leads religious people to corrupt the teachings of a dead prophet so eventually, God's truth will become extremely corrupted. Later, God sends another prophet *to correct* the degenerate ideas people believe to be truth.

The second prophet makes people angry and they kill him. Often when this happens, the second dead prophet becomes highly exalted by some people. The devil continues the strategy and leads people to corrupt the teachings of the second prophet, so God's truth is again greatly corrupted.

Then, God sends a third prophet . . . Do you get the picture? If you do, you are on the way to understanding how important the topic of inspiration really is.

Summary

The reason the topic of inspiration can be such a can of worms is due to the fact that God is constantly unfolding truth and knowledge. "New and improved" are words that eternally describe the ongoing actions of God. Look around. Have you noticed the rapid release of technology in the past twenty years. I don't believe there is any aspect of life that hasn't be made better with advancements in knowledge within the past twenty years except religion.

Why is God releasing such expansive knowledge to man and at the same time, the only good religion is the "old-time religion." Why is this? Why is religion so hard to change? In a word, it's this: tradition. People inherently like tradition, there's just something secure about saying, "we've just always done it this way...."

The problem though is that God and tradition stand in opposition to each other. God is not traditional! (Think about this: If Heaven were bound by traditions, what would life be like after 40 million years of tradition?) Make no mistake about this, in terms of moral virtues, God changes not. In terms of new creations, God never stops.

In closing, I'd like to leave two thoughts for consideration. First, there are characteristics of God that never change. God is righteous and He loves righteousness. When God created man, He defined righteousness for us by giving us His Ten Commandments.

Bear in mind though, that loving righteousness is different than just doing right. Being legally right is not enough. God wants His children to love righteousness because the government of Heaven is based on righteousness! Because He is righteous, everything He does is good, purposeful and beneficial for His creatures even though they may not understand His actions until a period of time passes. Because "new and improved" is ever God's way, His creatures can never limit Him.

He has ten thousand ways of doing things we know nothing of. So, we have to trust Him even though we shall never understand all there is to know about Him. *He has proven beyond question that He can be trusted without question.* (I rarely say anything profound, but that is profound.)

Second, I have studied the Bible for a few years and have come to the following conclusions concerning inspiration:

1. Everything man needs to know about God's love and offer of salvation is contained in the 66 books we call the Bible. God closed the Bible in A.D. 350 because everything necessary for salvation had been written by that date. (This isn't to say that God stopped inspiring people by A.D. 350, rather, since A.D. 350 the 66 books of the Bible and the Bible *alone* has spiritual authority. There is no other spiritual authority.)
2. Many times throughout the history of the Bible, God has demonstrated that He is negotiable, patient and long-suffering. This means that whenever men fail, God starts over. He hasn't given up on mankind. The important point here is that when God starts over, He changes or adapts His plans and He reveals the changes and/or adaptations through inspiration to His servants, the prophets. Thus, later inspiration proves that God has either redefined or changed earlier plans. In essence, this means that some New Testament doctrines make some Old Testament doctrines obsolete.
3. God reveals more and more about Himself and His plans as time passes. Thus, each generation has to review and renew their understanding of God. Failure to do this leads to a gross misrepresentation of God and His ways.
4. Inspiration operates on two levels. On the first level, God speaks or reveals information to a person. That inspired person then shares what was revealed. The second level has to do with personal response. If I am open to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, then whenever I read or hear inspiration, the Spirit bears witness within me confirming what is truth. In this fashion, the "spiritual circuit" is completed: The Holy Spirit inspired the person to share a message from God and the Holy Spirit confirmed the message within my heart. Twice blessed!

Perhaps the best part of inspiration is this: Everyone can participate or benefit from it through the ministry of the Spirit of Truth if they are willing. When the inspiration is from God, the revelation glorifies and magnifies a wonderful God! When the source of inspiration is evil, the message and messengers ultimately lead individuals away from God.

So, beware and be informed. Claims of inspiration should not be taken lightly.