FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

BIBLIOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Word of God

UNIT 2: THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

Lesson 6

THE TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE TO ITS OWN INSPIRATION

The Self-Attesting Word

1 Corinthians 14:37; 2 Peter 3:15–16

Key Texts: 2 Samuel 23:2; John 10:35;

> *"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."*
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> **2 Timothy 3:16–17, NASB 1995**

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Introduction

Over the last three lessons, we have established what the church means by the inspiration of Scripture. We have seen that the Bible is theopneustos, breathed out by God, with inspiration extending to the very words of every part of the text. We have examined how God worked through genuine human authors in the mystery of the concursus, producing a text that is simultaneously and without remainder both fully divine and fully human. We have considered the testimony of Christ Himself and of the apostle Paul to verbal-plenary inspiration, and we have seen how the New Testament's characteristic pattern of argumentation presupposes that every word of the inspired text is intentional, authoritative, and theologically freighted.

In this final lesson of Unit 2, we turn to a question that is foundational to everything else: How does Scripture itself claim to be the Word of God? We have been arguing that the Bible is divinely inspired, but does the Bible make this claim on its own behalf? And if it does, is that claim viciously circular (a document using itself to prove itself), or is there a more philosophically and theologically defensible account of what is happening when Scripture attests to its own divine origin and authority?

These questions matter enormously because they touch the nerve of the entire doctrine. If Scripture does not claim divine inspiration for itself, then the doctrine is an external imposition, a theological construct built by the church rather than a self-evident feature of the text. And if the claim to self-attestation is merely circular in the vicious sense, then the entire edifice of biblical authority collapses into question-begging. This lesson will demonstrate that neither of these concerns is warranted. Scripture claims its own divine origin with remarkable consistency and force, from the earliest prophetic oracles to the final apostolic letters. That claim, rightly understood, is not logically disreputable but is the only intellectually coherent posture toward an ultimate authority.

I. OLD TESTAMENT CLAIMS: "THUS SAYS THE LORD", OVER 3,800 TIMES

The single most pervasive feature of Old Testament literature is its claim to divine origin. The phrase "Thus says the LORD" (Hebrew: kŏh ʾāmar YHWH) or its functional equivalents ("the word of the LORD came to me," "declares the LORD," "the LORD spoke to Moses saying") occurs over 3,800 times across the Old Testament. This is not incidental ornamentation. It is the Old Testament's fundamental self-understanding: these writings are not the reflections of gifted human thinkers about God but the very words of the living God delivered through human messengers.

The cumulative weight of this claim is staggering. Every time the prophetic formula appears, it is making the same assertion: what follows is not the prophet's opinion, not his interpretation of events, not his religious insight, but the direct speech of the covenant God of Israel. The prophet stands in the council of the LORD (Jeremiah 23:18, 22), receives the divine word, and delivers it to the people with the same authoritative weight as a royal herald who carries and reads the king's own proclamation. The herald does not speak his own words; he speaks the king's. And what the king has decreed, the herald delivers with the king's authority behind every syllable.

The significance of this for the doctrine of inspiration cannot be overstated. The Old Testament does not present itself as a collection of ancient Israel's best thinking about God. It presents itself as God's own Word to Israel: authoritative, binding, life-giving, and demanding of total obedience. This self-presentation is the Old Testament's own testimony to its inspiration, and it is woven into the very fabric of the text from Genesis to Malachi.

II. THE PROPHETIC FORMULA: THE PROPHET AS THE MOUTHPIECE OF GOD

The mechanism by which the LORD's words came through human instruments is illuminated by two pivotal passages in which God explicitly describes the prophetic relationship.

A. Exodus 4:15–16: Aaron as Moses' Mouth

When Moses protested that he was not eloquent enough to stand before Pharaoh, God appointed Aaron as his spokesperson and described the arrangement in these terms:

> *"You are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you and you will be as God to him."*
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> **Exodus 4:15–16, NASB 1995**

The analogy is precise and instructive. Moses stands in relation to Aaron as God stands in relation to the prophet. Moses gives the words; Aaron delivers them. Aaron is genuinely speaking with his own voice, breath, and personality, and yet what he speaks is Moses' word, not his own. In exactly this way, the prophet is genuinely

speaking in his own voice, through his own personality, and yet what he speaks is God's word, not his own. The prophet's mouth is the instrument of the divine speech; the authority and content belong entirely to the One who commissioned him.

B. Jeremiah 1:9: The LORD's Words in the Prophet's Mouth

Jeremiah's call narrative makes the same point with even greater directness:

> *"Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, 'Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.'"*
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> **Jeremiah 1:9, NASB 1995**

The imagery is physical and intimate: the LORD reaches out and touches the prophet's mouth. It is an act of divine consecration that transforms the organ of speech into the vehicle of divine utterance. And the declaration that follows, "I have put My words in your mouth," is as explicit a statement of verbal inspiration as could be imagined. The words Jeremiah will speak are not his own words about God; they are God's own words placed by divine act in a human mouth. The prophet is not a religious philosopher who has reached theological conclusions through superior reasoning. He is a herald who carries a message not his own, bearing an authority not his own, speaking words not his own, and for that reason his words carry the full weight of the divine majesty.

Taken together, these passages establish the Old Testament's self-understanding: the prophetic literature is God's own speech, delivered through human agents who were designated, prepared, and authorized to speak on His behalf. This is not a later theological imposition on the text; it is the text's own claim about itself.

III. DAVID'S TESTIMONY: "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD SPOKE BY ME"

Among the most remarkable personal testimonies to inspiration in all of Scripture is David's final recorded words in 2 Samuel 23:1–2. David, reflecting on the whole of his life and ministry, speaks with luminous clarity about the source of the words he has written:

> *"The oracle of David the son of Jesse, and the oracle of the man who was raised on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel: 'The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue.'"*
>
> **2 Samuel 23:1–2, NASB 1995**

David does not say that the Spirit spoke to him, as if he received a message and then expressed it in his own words. He says that the Spirit spoke by him, that is, through him, using him as the instrument of divine utterance. The preposition is critical. David is not the recipient of inspiration who then authors his own response. He is the channel through whom the Spirit's own speech passes. And the declaration that "His word was on my tongue" is as direct a claim to verbal inspiration as the psalmist could make: the very words that came from David's mouth were the words of God.

This testimony is all the more significant because it comes from David in his role as Israel's poet-king, the author of much of the Psalter. When David says that the Spirit of the LORD spoke by him, he is making a claim about the Psalms themselves: these songs of praise and lament, of triumph and anguish, of faith and doubt, are not merely the finest expressions of Israelite religious experience. They are the words of the living God, spoken through a human instrument who understood himself to be precisely that: an instrument, not an originator.

This matters pastorally as well as theologically. When you read a psalm of lament and feel its raw honesty resonating with your own suffering, you are not simply reading a gifted ancient poet who captured human experience beautifully. You are reading a word from God to you, about your condition, spoken through David's pen by the Spirit who knows what you need to hear. The humanity of the psalms and their divine origin are not in tension; they are, precisely because of the concursus, two dimensions of the same Spirit-breathed text.

IV. JESUS' VIEW OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: AUTHORITATIVE, INERRANT, UNBREAKABLE

No witness to the divine authority of the Old Testament carries more weight than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. As the eternal Son of God and the supreme authority on the nature of Scripture, His testimony to the Old Testament's inspiration is decisive. And that testimony is consistent, comprehensive, and unequivocal: Jesus treats the entirety of the Old Testament as the authoritative, inerrant, and unbreakable Word of God.

A. The Unbreakability of Scripture: John 10:35

In the midst of a controversy with the Jewish leaders who accused Him of blasphemy, Jesus builds a defense from Psalm 82:6 and adds a parenthetical observation that reveals His settled conviction about the nature of Scripture:

> *"If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken)…"*
>
> **John 10:35, NASB 1995**

The Greek phrase is *ou dunatai luthēnai hē graphē*: the Scripture cannot be loosed, annulled, or rendered ineffective. Jesus says this in passing, as an axiom requiring no argument, no defense, no qualification. It is simply assumed as the self-evident starting point of all theological reasoning. Whatever the Scripture says stands. Whatever it promises will be fulfilled. Whatever it commands is binding. Whatever it asserts is true. The unbreakability of Scripture is, for Jesus, not a doctrine to be argued for but a bedrock conviction that governs His every encounter with the text.

This is particularly striking because the text on which Jesus is building His argument, Psalm 82:6, is not one of the great Messianic prophecies or the majestic creation accounts. It is a relatively obscure poetic text about divine judgment. And yet Jesus treats even this text as fully authoritative and unbreakable. There are no second-tier passages in Jesus' Bible. Every part of the Old Testament is equally the Scripture that cannot be broken.

B. Not One Jot or Tittle: Matthew 5:17–18

As we examined in Lesson 4, Jesus affirms in the Sermon on the Mount that not the smallest letter or the most minute orthographic stroke of the Law will pass away until all is accomplished (Matthew 5:17–18). This affirmation is not about the permanence of the Mosaic covenant as such but about the reliability and permanence of the written text. Every word has been placed there by divine intention; every word will stand until its purpose is accomplished. Jesus is not describing a general sentiment about Scripture's importance; He is making a precise claim about the verbal accuracy and permanent authority of the written text.

C. Scripture Cannot Be Set Aside: Matthew 22:29–32

When the Sadducees challenged Jesus about the resurrection with a scenario designed to make belief in resurrection seem absurd, He rebuked them sharply: "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matthew 22:29, NASB 1995). The assumption is that proper understanding of the Scriptures would have prevented their theological error. Scripture, properly read, is not ambiguous on the question of resurrection; it teaches it, and Jesus demonstrates this by building a momentous theological argument on a verb tense from Exodus 3:6. The God of the patriarchs speaks of Himself in the present tense because the patriarchs are alive before Him. The Scripture cannot be set aside; it carries authority over theological reasoning that no human tradition or philosophical argument can override.

The cumulative testimony of Jesus' engagement with the Old Testament leaves no room for doubt: He regarded it as fully authoritative, verbally precise, and absolutely inerrant. A disciple cannot have a lower view of Scripture than the one whose disciple he is. If we claim to follow Christ, we must receive the Scriptures with the same unreserved confidence with which He received them.

V. THE APOSTOLIC CLAIM: PAUL'S WRITINGS AS THE COMMAND OF THE LORD

The New Testament apostles did not merely teach about the inspiration of the Old Testament; they also made explicit claims to divine authority for their own writings and proclamation. These claims are remarkable in their directness and in their consciousness of standing in the prophetic tradition.

A. 1 Corinthians 14:37: The Apostolic Word as the Lord's Command

In the midst of his instructions about the ordering of worship and spiritual gifts in Corinth, Paul concludes with a statement of breathtaking authority:

> *"If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment."*
>
> **1 Corinthians 14:37, NASB 1995**

Paul does not say that his instructions are consistent with the Lord's commandment, or that they are a reasonable application of the Lord's principles, or that they carry the general spirit of the Lord's will. He says they are the Lord's commandment. Full stop. The things Paul writes carry the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. To

receive Paul's apostolic word is to receive the Lord's word; to reject it is to reject the Lord's authority. This is not apostolic arrogance; it is apostolic self-consciousness about the nature of the commission the risen Christ had given.

Paul makes the same claim in Galatians 1:11–12, where he insists that the gospel he preached was "not according to man" and that he "did not receive it from a man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." And in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, he expresses thanksgiving that his Thessalonian converts "when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God." The apostolic proclamation is, in Paul's own understanding, the Word of God, not in virtue of its agreement with some external standard but in virtue of its divine origin through revelation and apostolic commission.

B. 1 Corinthians 2:13: Words Taught by the Spirit

We have already examined this text in our lesson on verbal inspiration, but it bears repeating in this context. Paul claims that the apostolic proclamation is expressed "not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words" (1 Corinthians 2:13, NASB 1995). The apostolic witness is verbally inspired: the very words chosen for the communication of the gospel are words taught by the Holy Spirit. This is the New Testament's own internal claim to inspiration at the word level, coming from the pen of the most prolific New Testament author.

VI. PETER'S RECOGNITION OF PAUL'S LETTERS AS SCRIPTURE

One of the most significant witnesses to the early church's recognition of the New Testament canon is found in the second letter of Peter, where the apostle places Paul's letters explicitly alongside the Old Testament Scriptures:

> *"Regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction."*
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> **2 Peter 3:15–16, NASB 1995**

The phrase "the rest of the Scriptures" (Greek*: tas loipas graphas*) is decisive. Peter places Paul's letters in the same category as the Old Testament Scriptures: they are *graphas*, a term used consistently in the New Testament for inspired, authoritative Scripture. Peter is not saying that Paul's letters are important or helpful or theologically rich. He is saying they are Scripture, on the same level of divine authority as the Law and the Prophets.

This recognition is all the more striking when we remember that Paul and Peter had a notable public confrontation at Antioch (Galatians 2:11–14), where Paul rebuked Peter to his face. Their relationship was not uncomplicated. And yet Peter, writing near the end of his life, places Paul's letters in the canon of Holy Scripture without

qualification or hesitation. The recognition of Paul's authority was not driven by personal admiration or ecclesiastical politics; it was driven by the Spirit's witness to the apostolic character of Paul's writing.

We can observe a similar process elsewhere in the New Testament. Paul quotes Luke's Gospel as "Scripture" in 1 Timothy 5:18, citing alongside Deuteronomy 25:4 the saying "The laborer is worthy of his wages," which appears in Luke 10:7. This is a New Testament author citing another New Testament writing as Scripture within the apostolic period itself. The recognition of the New Testament canon did not begin with fourth-century church councils; it began within the apostolic community, as the apostles themselves recognized the divine authority of one another's writings.

VII. THE SELF-REFERENTIAL NATURE OF SCRIPTURE'S AUTHORITY: THE CIRCULARITY OBJECTION

We come now to the most philosophically challenging aspect of the doctrine of self-attestation: the circularity objection. The objection runs as follows: "You say the Bible is the Word of God because the Bible claims to be the Word of God. But that is circular reasoning: you are using the Bible to prove the Bible. Any document could make such a claim about itself, and self-attestation would validate them all equally."

This objection deserves a serious and careful response, because it is widely deployed and superficially plausible. But it rests on a misunderstanding of what circularity means when it comes to ultimate authorities, and it applies a standard that, consistently applied, would undermine every system of knowledge, not just the Christian view of Scripture.

A. Every Ultimate Authority Is Self-Attesting

Consider the epistemological situation of any worldview. Every system of thought must eventually reach some bedrock, some foundational authority or first principle from which everything else is derived. The rationalist appeals to human reason as his ultimate authority. But why trust reason? Because reason tells him that reason is reliable. The empiricist appeals to sensory experience as his ultimate authority. But why trust the senses? Because sensory experience (and the reasoning derived from it) tells him that sensory experience is reliable. The appeal to reason to justify reason, and the appeal to sensory experience to justify sensory experience, are both circular. Every ultimate authority must, in the last analysis, attest to itself, because there is no higher authority to which it can appeal without ceasing to be ultimate.

The question, therefore, is not whether a system's ultimate authority is self-attesting (all of them are), but whether the self-attesting authority is credible, coherent, and consistent with the full range of human experience and knowledge. The Christian's appeal to Scripture as self-attesting is not logically different in kind from the rationalist's appeal to reason or the empiricist's appeal to experience; it is different in that the authority being appealed to is the Word of the God who created reason and experience and who therefore stands behind both.

B. The Testimony of the Holy Spirit

John Calvin captured the Christian answer to the circularity objection with characteristic precision. The authority of Scripture, Calvin argued, does not rest on the church's endorsement of it, for that would make the church a higher authority than Scripture. Nor does it rest merely on rational arguments in its favor, for that would make human reason the arbiter of divine authority. Rather, Scripture carries its authority in itself, as the Word of God (this is the autopistia of Scripture), and that self-attesting authority is recognized by the regenerate mind through the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit (testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti).

The Spirit does not provide new information about the Bible's reliability. He does not give the believer a private revelation that the Bible is true. Rather, He illumines the mind and renews the heart so that the believer is enabled to see what was always there: the majesty of God shining through the words of Scripture, the internal coherence and power of the divine message, the fulfillment of prophecy, the transformation it produces in lives, and above all, the ring of truth that the Word of God carries in the ears of those who have been born of the Spirit. As Calvin wrote in the Institutes: "The same Spirit who spoke through the prophets must penetrate our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully delivered the message that was divinely entrusted to them."

C. The Objection Applied Consistently

There is a final and decisive response to the circularity objection: it proves too much. If it is illegitimate to appeal to Scripture's own testimony in defense of Scripture's authority, then it is equally illegitimate to appeal to reason's testimony in defense of reason's authority, or to sensory experience's testimony in defense of sensory experience's authority. The objection, consistently applied, destroys all knowledge, not just theological knowledge. But since the objector clearly does not intend to destroy all knowledge (he intends only to disqualify the Christian appeal to Scripture), he is applying his epistemological standard selectively and therefore inconsistently.

The Christian response is to expose this inconsistency and to offer a more honest account: every worldview rests on self-attesting presuppositions. The question is not which worldview avoids presuppositions (none do) but which presuppositions are true, coherent, and capable of making sense of the world as we find it. The Christian presupposition that the God of Scripture has spoken, and that His Word therefore carries absolute authority, is the presupposition without which knowledge itself would be impossible, including the knowledge required to mount the circularity objection.

Key Texts (NASB 1995)

> *"The oracle of David the son of Jesse… The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue."*
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> **2 Samuel 23:1–2**

> *"… and the Scripture cannot be broken."*
>
> **John 10:35**

> *"If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment."*
>
> **1 Corinthians 14:37**

> *"Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you… speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction."*
>
> **2 Peter 3:15–16**

Theological Terms and Definitions

Self-Attestation	The property of Scripture whereby it bears witness to its own divine origin and authority. Scripture does not derive its authority from an external source (the church, tradition, human reason) but claims and carries authority in itself as the Word of God. Self-attestation is grounded in the identity of the Author: because God cannot lie, His Word authenticates itself.
Autopistia	From the Greek autos ("self") and pistis ("faith, trustworthiness"). The classical Reformed term for the self-authenticating character of Scripture. Used especially by John Calvin to describe how the authority of Scripture rests in itself (not in the church's verdict about it) and is confirmed to the believer by the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit.
Testimonium Internum Spiritus Sancti	Latin for "the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit." The Reformed doctrine that the Holy Spirit works inwardly in the heart of the believer to confirm and seal the divine authority of Scripture. This testimony is not a new revelation but the Spirit's illuminating work that enables the regenerate reader to recognize in Scripture the voice of God.
Prophetic Formula	The recurring phrase "Thus says the LORD" (Hebrew: kŏh 'āmar YHWH) or "The word of the LORD came to me," used over 3,800 times in the Old Testament to introduce a divine message delivered through a human spokesperson. The formula is a formal claim of divine origin: the prophet is not sharing his own opinion but transmitting the very words of God.
Apostolic Authority	The unique authority granted by Christ to the apostles as the authorized eyewitnesses and representatives of the risen Lord, commissioned to speak and write with divine authority. The apostolic writings carry the authority of Christ Himself; to receive the apostolic word is to receive Christ's word. This authority was not transferable and ceased with the death of the apostles, whose writings were inscripturated in the New Testament.
Circularity (Vicious vs. Virtuous)	An argument is viciously circular if it assumes what it sets out to prove in a logically invalid way (e.g., "the Bible is true because the Bible says it is true" without further warrant). A virtuously circular argument, by contrast, is one in which the starting presupposition is self-attesting and internally consistent, as every ultimate authority must be. The Christian's appeal to Scripture as self-attesting is not viciously circular but is the only coherent response to the question of ultimate authority.
Canon	From the Greek kanōn ("reed, measuring rod, rule"). The list of books recognized by the church as inspired and authoritative Scripture. The canon is the church's formal acknowledgment of what God had already determined to be His written Word; the church did not create the canon's authority but recognized and submitted to an authority already inherent in the inspired text.
Plenary Conciliar Recognition	The process by which church councils (Hippo, 393 AD; Carthage, 397 AD) formally ratified the New Testament canon. These councils did not grant authority to the biblical books but recognized the authority already present in them by virtue of their apostolic origin and the witness of the Spirit in the church. Their recognition was the culmination of a process already well advanced in the earliest Christian communities.
The Unbreakability of Scripture	Jesus' affirmation in John 10:35 that "the Scripture cannot be broken." The Greek ou dunatai luthēnai hē graphē means that Scripture cannot be loosed, annulled, or rendered ineffective. This statement, made in passing as an axiom requiring no argument, reveals Jesus' settled conviction that the written text of the Old Testament is inviolable in its authority: every word binding, every promise certain, every command obligatory.

Mutual Recognition of Apostolic Writings	The process by which the New Testament authors recognized one another's writings as Scripture. Most notably, Peter places Paul's letters alongside "the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:15–16), and Paul quotes Luke's Gospel as "Scripture" (1 Timothy 5:18; cf. Luke 10:7). This mutual recognition demonstrates that the New Testament canon was not a late ecclesiastical invention but was acknowledged from within the apostolic community itself.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that the Bible's authority does not rest on our endorsement of it, on the church's verdict about it, or on the conclusions of scholarly investigation regarding it. It rests on the character of its Author. Because God is who He is (the God who cannot lie [Titus 1:2], whose word is truth [John 17:17], who upholds all things by the word of His power [Hebrews 1:3]), His Word carries absolute authority in itself. Scripture is self-attesting not because it says so in an isolated proof text, but because every page of it bears the character of the God who breathed it out. Our confidence in Scripture is ultimately confidence in God, and that confidence is confirmed in the heart of every believer by the Spirit who inspired the text and who now illumines our reading of it.

We must also believe that the testimony of Scripture to its own inspiration is not philosophically embarrassing but philosophically necessary. There is no neutral, presupposition-free standpoint from which Scripture's authority could be evaluated. We all begin with presuppositions, and the Christian's presupposition that the God of Scripture has spoken with absolute authority is the only presupposition that can ground the coherent knowledge of anything at all.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

The doctrine of self-attestation, rightly understood, should produce in us a profound sense of security and rest. We do not need to wait for the next archaeological discovery to confirm that the Bible is trustworthy. We do not need to anxiously monitor the latest conclusions of biblical scholarship to know whether our confidence in Scripture is warranted. The Bible carries its own authority, and the Spirit who breathed it out has confirmed that authority in our hearts. When David said "The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue," he was expressing the settled assurance of a man who had heard God speak and knew it. That same assurance is available to every believer who opens the Scripture with a heart prepared by the Spirit to receive it.

Let this lesson also produce in you a greater reverence for the breadth of Scripture's self-witness. It is not one passage but thousands (3,800 prophetic formulas in the Old Testament alone) that collectively make the same claim: this is the Word of God. The consistency and comprehensiveness of that claim is itself a testimony to the single divine mind that authored the whole.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

1. Read Scripture as the self-attesting Word. When you open the Bible, come to it with the expectation that God speaks in it directly, not as a collection of human religious documents that may or may not contain divine truth. The self-attesting Word does not need you to authenticate it; it authenticates itself. Your task is to listen.

2. Handle the objection with confidence. When the circularity objection is raised, as it will be, do not retreat into defensiveness or embarrassed qualification. Understand the epistemological argument well enough to expose its inconsistency and to offer the positive case: every ultimate authority is self-attesting, and the question is not whether your presuppositions are presuppositions but whether they are true.

3. Test all teaching by Scripture's own standard. Because Scripture carries its own authority, it is also the standard by which all other teaching is measured. The Bereans "received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11, NASB 1995). This is the posture of every faithful

Christian: not credulity toward every voice that claims divine authority, but testing every claim against the self-attesting Word.

4. Pray for the Spirit's illumination. The self-attestation of Scripture is confirmed in the heart by the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. But this is a work of grace, not a mechanical guarantee. Pray that the Spirit would open your eyes to see the majesty and authority of the Word, that what has always been there on the page would come alive in your heart as the living voice of the living God.

5. Teach the next generation. One of the great pastoral responsibilities of every parent, teacher, and elder is to instill in the next generation a settled, unshakeable confidence in the authority of Scripture, a confidence that does not waver when critics attack, does not collapse when hard questions arise, and does not require the approval of the academy to stand firm. Ground that confidence not in human arguments alone but in the self-attesting Word itself and the Spirit who confirms it.

D. *For Every Season of Life*

For the new believer still finding your footing: You may sometimes feel uncertain about whether you can trust the Bible, especially when you encounter passages that are difficult or when you hear scholars questioning its reliability. Here is the anchor: the Bible's authority does not depend on your ability to resolve every difficulty. It rests on the character of God. Trust the God who cannot lie, and you are trusting the Word He breathed out. Let the Spirit's work in your heart (the conviction, the illumination, the sense of hearing a living voice) confirm what is already objectively true of the text.

For the believer called to defend the faith: The doctrine of self-attestation is not a retreat from apologetics; it is the foundation of a robust apologetics. You can engage every objection, whether historical, philosophical, or scientific, with full intellectual seriousness, while never conceding the ground of Scripture's self-attesting authority. You are not trying to argue someone into accepting Scripture as if it were neutral territory to be won by argument; you are bearing witness to the Word that carries its own authority, trusting the Spirit to confirm it in the hearts of those who hear.

For the pastor and teacher: Every time you open the Scripture to preach or teach, you are handling the self-attesting Word of God. You do not need to preface your exposition with an apology for the text or a disclaimer about its cultural limitations. Preach it as what it is: the authoritative, inerrant, sufficient, and living Word of the God who cannot be silenced. The prophets knew that when they said "Thus says the LORD," they were not offering their own opinion. Neither are you.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Have you ever encountered someone who challenged the Bible's authority by pointing out that it "just claims to be true about itself"? How did you respond? What would you say differently now, having studied the doctrine of self-attestation?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

2. Read 2 Samuel 23:1–2. How does David describe the source of the words he has spoken? What is the significance of the preposition "by" in the phrase "The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me" rather than "to me"?
3. Read John 10:34–36. What is the context of Jesus' statement that "the Scripture cannot be broken"? What does the way He uses this phrase, as a parenthetical assumption rather than an argument, reveal about His view of Scripture's authority?
4. Read 2 Peter 3:14–16. What specific term does Peter use to categorize Paul's letters alongside the Old Testament writings? Why is the phrase "the rest of the Scriptures" significant for the doctrine of the New Testament canon?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

5. What is the difference between the prophet as a spokesperson for God versus the prophet as a religious thinker sharing his best insights about God? How do passages like Exodus 4:15–16 and Jeremiah 1:9 establish which of these models the Old Testament uses?
6. In 1 Corinthians 14:37, Paul claims that his written instructions are "the Lord's commandment." What does this claim tell us about how Paul understood his own apostolic authority? How does this relate to the doctrine of inspiration?
7. The lesson argues that the circularity objection against Scripture's self-attestation proves too much: consistently applied, it would undermine all knowledge. Explain this argument in your own words. Do you find it convincing?
8. What is the testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti, and how does it address the question of how the believer comes to recognize Scripture's self-attesting authority? What is the relationship between the objective self-attestation of the text and the Spirit's subjective confirmation in the heart?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

9. The lesson argues that our confidence in Scripture is ultimately confidence in God. How does this reframe the question of biblical authority for you personally? Does it change how you approach doubts about specific passages or difficult texts?
10. Read Acts 17:10–11. The Bereans are commended for testing Paul's teaching against the Scriptures. What does this pattern of testing all teaching against Scripture look like in practice in your church community? Are there areas where this discipline is weak or strong?
11. Unit 2 has covered the doctrine of inspiration across six lessons, from the definition of theopneustos to verbal-plenary inspiration, dual authorship, and now self-attestation. Looking back over the unit, what single conviction about the nature of Scripture has been most deepened or sharpened for you? How will it change the way you read and use the Bible?

12. In light of everything covered in this unit on inspiration, write a single paragraph that summarizes what you believe about the Bible: where it came from, how it was produced, what kind of authority it carries, and how you know that authority is real. Be as precise and as personal as you can.

Prayer Focus

Spend time in prayer as a group, thanking God that He has not left us without a self-attesting Word, a Word whose authority does not depend on human endorsement, scholarly approval, or ecclesiastical verdict but rests in the character of the God who breathed it out. Thank Him for the prophets who faithfully delivered what God placed in their mouths, for the apostles who wrote under the Lord's authority, and for the Spirit who confirms the divine origin of Scripture in the hearts of His people. Ask the Lord to give your group a settled, joyful, and unshakeable confidence in the self-attesting Word, a confidence that can engage hard questions without anxiety because it rests not on the strength of our arguments but on the character of the God who cannot lie.

This lesson concludes Unit 2: The Inspiration of Scripture. In the four lessons of this unit, we have established the full classical doctrine of biblical inspiration: what it means for God to breathe out Scripture, how that inspiration extends to every word and every part, how it works through the full humanity of the biblical authors without compromising the divine authority of the text, and how Scripture bears consistent witness to its own divine origin from Genesis to Revelation. In Unit 3, we will build directly on this foundation as we take up the closely related doctrine of inerrancy: the claim that the God-breathed Word is, in all that it affirms, without error.

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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