

## Differing Views of Inspiration

2 Timothy 3:16 makes the claim that the Bible is inspired (literally, “God-breathed”). However, the definition of “inspiration” may vary from person to person, and these differences in understanding can often hinder meaningful discussion about the Scriptures. Consider several different views of the concept of “inspiration” that a person might encounter today.

### ***Some believe that “inspiration” merely describes literary excellence and beauty –***

Some claim that the Bible is only “inspired” in the same sense that great poetry by Shakespeare or Robert Frost is “inspired.” According to this view, the Bible is the product of some wonderfully talented and gifted human beings, but nothing more (and especially nothing supernatural) is involved. One problem with this view is that the Bible writers themselves claim that their words originated with God, not man (cf. Hosea 1:1; Ezekiel 1:3; 1 Tim. 5:18; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 3:15-16). The Bible IS a beautifully written book, but it also clearly claims to be SO much more than that!

### ***Some believe that only the thoughts (but not the words themselves) are inspired***

– By arguing that God gave Bible writers the general thoughts but not the specific words He wanted written, those who hold this view allow for the authors to have potentially made mistakes concerning the “minor details” of Scripture. Significantly, however, Jesus took even the “minor details” (words, verb tenses, singular vs. plural nouns, etc.) of Scripture seriously (cf. Matt. 4:4; 5:17-18; Luke 24:25), as did Paul and the apostles (Rom. 15:4; Gal. 3:16). Additionally, one wonders how God could ever communicate ideas to authors of Scripture without actually using words, which are vehicles of thought.

***Some believe that “inspiration” is personal and subjective*** – The “neo-orthodox” view of inspiration redefines everything. Under this view, Jesus is the “Word of God,” and the Bible itself is neither inspired nor objectively true. Rather, the Bible is a medium that God may sometimes use to make the “Word of God” experientially real to a reader. So “inspiration” has also been redefined to refer to a process by which we encounter Jesus rather than a property inherent in the text itself. Among the serious problems with this view is the fact that the parable of the soils demonstrates that there is power inherent in the message itself (Luke 8:11; cf. Rom. 1:16) while placing the blame for a lack of fruit on the condition of the listener’s heart (cf. Matt. 13:18-23).

***The Bible itself claims verbal, plenary inspiration*** – The Bible indicates that God inspired individuals to write exactly what He wanted, while at the same time working within their personal experiences, styles and concerns. Thus, inspiration is said to be both ***verbal*** (spoken by God to man), and ***plenary*** (every single word is inspired) [Ps. 119:160; John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21]. Scripture is completely reliable precisely because it is given by a God who cannot lie (Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:17-18).

Christians who are serious about loving the lost would do well to consider the various uses and definitions of the word “inspiration” in the religious world. Let us dedicate ourselves to promoting and defending the truth concerning God’s inspired word! **--JB**