

Theories of Inspiration and the Purpose of Scripture

Hello, everybody. Welcome back to Thinking Theologically, the show where we teach you how and why you should think theologically. I'm one of your hosts, Jack Dodgen, joined by our resident theologian in training, Spencer Shaw. Spencer, how you doing? Doing pretty good. Doing pretty good. We're, school semester is about over. Holidays are right around the corner. So it's an exciting time of year. Most wonderful time of the year. Yeah, looking forward to uh, little breaks with the, with the holiday schedule coming up. We got a Colorado trip this year for Thanksgiving, probably the last time we'll go up to Colorado. For a holiday thing with the family up there moving somewhere else. But, uh, it'll be nice. Hopefully getting to play some disc golf while I'm up there. Cause... Of course. See, that's my hope when I go back to Texas for that. See, that's one of the nice things about Texas winters being a little more mild than most places, right? You can still generally get out on the golf course. Even during the holiday times, um, at least towards the end of the year because it's going to be pretty late when Texas normally sees its coldest time and that's not that cold. Normally. I think we've already had snow in Colorado, so I may not get to do anything, but hopefully. You know, Tyler has a great disc golf course too, apparently, so. Really? I might need to go down there sometime. Come down. Yeah, well, just party on. You can play golf with me and be bad, and I'll play golf with you and be terrible. That sounds perfect. Perfect. Speaking of all of our holiday stuff, those of you listening here, we are going to have... Uh, I guess I, well, I'm bringing this up, but I'm not sure we're entirely decided. There may be an episode next week. If not, it'll be the first Thursday of December because we didn't want to With, uh, with some various things that both of us have going on, plus going into the holidays, it's going to shape the schedule a little weird, but I think you are going to enjoy the episodes, our topics that we'll be covering, uh, over the next little bit here, so. Be patient. They'll be worth the wait. Perfect to listen to and go back and listen to ones you haven't while you're on the road traveling for the holidays. I don't know about anybody with your family over Thanksgiving. Yeah. Uh, there's, I, I know I will be, uh, I think my family comes up with theological related topics that they know we're going to disagree on to ask me about. Like, it can't just be a coincidence. Makes sense. You are fun to argue with. I mean, I'm sure that's every, religion and politics have a way of popping up at I think most people's holidays and family gatherings, so look forward to that. Hopefully it will help bring your families together with theological discussion. If you have ideas for us to cover topics you want us to deal with, we're coming up on the Beginning of the next year. So we're wrapping up twenty-one and heading into twenty-two Uh, have some ideas planned for next year, but we'd always love to hear from you about our individual episodes or potential things that you want us to address. You can send those to strongchurchministries@gmail.com. Love to hear any of your feedback, suggestions, or criticisms. You can get to us on Facebook as well and to Spencer on Twitter. I did not forget this week to plug the Twitter. Thank you. Yeah, please, please follow him. Give him more followers. That would be great. Uh, today we are going to deal with the topic of inspiration, uh, which is maybe a lot more broad than you might think as far as a subject goes. I mean, it sounds like a big idea, but it's not often treated as such. We kind of have a typical... Thought process that we fall into that is what is taught and generally accepted and so we're gonna open those gates a little more and talk about Uh, at least five theories of inspiration kind of running the gambit here uh, ideologically speaking and then we'll work from there. So Good episode coming in to today. We're going to start by breaking down some of these theories of inspiration in the little parentheses of our notes. We didn't talk about this specifically. We have conservative hyphen liberal. So I'm assuming from one to five we're gonna get a little more progressive on each one. Is that an accurate representation, Spencer, of what we're gonna do? Yes, we've got these five theories and the first one is going to be the most conservative approach to inspiration and the final one is not the most liberal one but the most liberal one we're going to talk about. Okay. Fair enough. Fair enough. Well, let's start with, uh, let's start with number one then, which kind of gets a, gets a special name from us as well. I don't know if you came up with this or not, but, uh, At the number one slot, we have verbal dictation, i.e. the robot view. Spencer, tell us a little bit about robot view. Robot View is my name for this first one. That's not an official name. I don't think you're going to find it in any textbook or anything like that, but that's what I like to call it. I'm trying not to tip my hat too much to... My issues with some of these and kind of where I stand, but I think I might have by naming the first one robot view. Um, but, but before I mention it, I do want to say that kind of the. The foundation that we're going to be building upon in talking about inspiration, but it seems like for a couple of episodes at least. Is that we're building from the foundation that we all believe that scripture is inspired and so we're not going to be arguing or trying to prove that scripture is inspired. But we're building from the foundation that we believe that scripture is inspired by God, but asking questions of how does that work? How does inspiration work? How did God inspire? So more

of the mechanics of inspiration, not arguing for the existence of inspiration. We're going to assume that you, like us, believe that scripture is inspired, but like I said, trying to figure out the mechanics of how exactly that works. And so that's where these kind of theories of inspiration come in. And, um, these five are not all inclusive. There's, these aren't the only five theories of inspiration and there are different caveats underneath each of these as well. So there's a lot, you could, we could be a lot more extensive when we're talking about theories of inspiration, but what I think these five do is I think they give us a good grasp of what are the most common held theories. And the most well-known theories because within scholarship in particular, there are some of these theories that maybe a lot of people don't hold but are very popular and have a lot of influence in the way that we think about inspiration. Whether or not they're ones that the average person accepts. And so I think these five kind of do a good job of creating a foundation for us to understand what are the views that are out there. And what I want to encourage you to do as you hear these is kind of just keep all these five in the back of your mind as we continue throughout this episode and the next episode. Think about which one you agree with. Which one you don't, which ones you don't like, which ones you have issue with, and why, and kind of, I would encourage you to keep those thoughts at the front of your mind as we go through some of the other things that we're going to be talking about under the topic of inspiration and then we're going to come back at the very end of our two episode discussion of inspiration. We weren't sure if we were gonna, cause this is all one page of notes, but then we looked at it and went, maybe this is two episodes. So I think we're confirming now looking at the clock going, this will be two episodes. Yeah, considering we haven't even gotten to the notes and we're ten minutes in. That's right. Tell me about robot view. Probably going to be too. So, uh, verbal, uh, dictation robot view is the, the theory of inspiration that God dictated, uh, every word using the voice of the author. So in this, what you really get is the author being like God's robot. They didn't have any choice over the wording that was used. God chose, God controlled everything. But the way that this view makes sense of the differing voices in scripture, which is one thing that any theory of inspiration has to grapple with is, you know, you've got five, you've got four gospels and they all sound different. Right. Matthew sounds like Matthew. Luke sounds like Luke. Mark sounds like Mark. John sounds like John. So you've got these different voices, these different ways of telling the story. Paul sounds like Paul. He doesn't sound like Peter. Peter sounds like Peter. When we move on to the epistles, the authors sound different because they are different. And so the way a verbal dictation view has to deal with that is to say, well, God spoke by using the voice of the author, it's not the actual author's voice that we're hearing. They had no say over anything. 100% God. Just choosing words that fit the author's vocabulary and style and knowledge and way of speaking. And so a verbal dictation view would hold an idea that Scripture is inerrant. It's without error in any form or fashion. It has no error theologically. It has no error scientifically. It has no error historically because God is choosing every word. So there's no way for any kind of human error to find its way into scripture. And that moves us to the, the second, uh, theory of inspiration, which is the, uh, verbal plenary inspiration. And this is the view that is held by the majority of, uh, conservative Christians. If you think about Christianity at large, this would be the view that most, uh, Evangelical Christians, at least in the United States, hold. What your more conservative scholars would hold is an idea of verbal plenary inspiration. And what that means is verbal means words. And plenary means full or complete. So all of scripture from cover to cover from Genesis through Revelations is inspired and all of the words are inspired. So the difference between this and the verbal dictation is God's not choosing the words and doing it all, the writers have the freedom to use their own style, to use their own language, to use their own knowledge in writing the books that they wrote. But God as the inspirer, I don't know if that's actually a word or not, but we're going to use it. God as the inspirer is sitting behind and making sure that every individual word that's chosen is the word that he wants chosen. So, uh, you're, you're not to the point of God using the writers like robots, but you still have every word in scripture. Uh, every word from what seemed like unimportant words like the word and or for, you know, those conjunction words to your more important words like resurrection or propitiation or some of those more theologically rich terms, love, grace, peace, everything has God behind it in some form or fashion. And so again, you would have the idea built into this view that scripture is inerrant. It's without error historically. Theologically and scientifically, because again, you have God behind every word, just in a slightly different fashion. You're leaving more room for the different authors to be themselves, which is what we see going on in scripture. That moves us to the third view, which is kind of, I think, a middle ground view between some of the more conservative ways of thinking about inspiration and some of the more liberal or progressive ways of thinking about inspiration. And that's an inspired concepts view. And that is pretty much the idea that God gave the writers the concepts and allowed them to put them into their own words. And there are a multitude of different ways to kind of tease this out on how exactly it works. So I'm not going to try to do that

too much because there's probably a hundred different ways to think about how that can work. But it's the idea that God inspired the writers, he gave the writers the, these These theological concepts, these truths that God wants to get across to human beings. It then allowed the authors, uh, the freedom to put those concepts into their own words to tell them in the way that they wanted to tell them. To tell those truths in a way that best fit their audience, which I think is important for us to think about when we think of inspiration, right? Matthew's writing to a particular audience. That's why he tells his story in his way. Matthew seems to be writing to Jews. Luke's writing Gentiles. So they tell their stories differently. Paul is dealing with specific churches with specific problems. None of Paul's letters are really general. They're all very specific. But Paul, in dealing with these specific things, is still presenting and working from a foundation of these conceptual truths, these things that are And so that's kind of what the inspired concepts would say is that, yeah, Paul has these concepts, these truths. That through his own language and within these individual situations, he's choosing how he wants to get these things across to the church that he's writing. And so in the inspired concepts, uh, depending on who you ask, you may or may not have people that believe in this concept and believe that scripture is inerrant. You may have some that say that the concepts, the point, the application, if you will, of what's said is true. Uh, but there may be some human error that has found its way in. It may not be all historically accurate. It may not all be scientifically accurate, but it's at least theologically accurate. The point. Is what's inspired. You've got others that will hold to this that will say, no, a scripture is inerrant. It's without error in, in everything that it says. But they will probably want to redefine how you and how, how we define error and how we define truth. Right. Which is something in the next episode we're actually going to talk about. How do we think about truth? What makes scripture true? What makes anything true? And so therefore what makes How are we going to define error and all those kinds of things? But that's a discussion to come. So kind of hold that in your back of your mind. Um. The fourth view is a personal encounter view, which has famously been held by a theologian by the name of Karl Barth. Most of you probably haven't ever heard of him. Read him if you haven't. I've read his evangelical theology, which is a phenomenal, phenomenal, phenomenal work. Um, he's one of the most influential theologians ever. Probably the most influential contemporary theologian. We've probably all been influenced by him and just don't realize it. Um, that, that's the kind of thing that I mean by the most, um, Uh, I guess to use inspiration, he's most inspirational because he's impacted a lot of different people. But, uh, he kind of had this personal encounter view and that is that the Bible has some errors. But through it, the reader encounters God. And so the truth of Scripture isn't found in the words necessarily in what's said. But how God uses scripture as a vehicle to encounter the one who is reading it. Bart says that just as a dog hears his master's voice through the imperfect phonograph recording, which kind of shows how Bart's a little bit older. Uh, I don't even quite know what a phonograph is. Um, but I guess you could say in, uh, just as the way the dog hears the master's voice through the audio recording or through the phone. Uh, so the Christian can hear God speak through errant scripture. So what, uh, Bart would say is, you know, when you record yourself, it distorts your voice a little bit. It's not exactly the same. But you still know who's speaking. You can still identify who it is that's speaking. And Bart would say the same thing about scripture. He would say, yeah, there may be some errors in scripture. But the point is how we encounter God. We can still hear and encounter the true and the living God through scripture, even if it contains some errors. And so that's what Bart would say. The final view is the demythological view, which was made famous by another important modern theologian by the name of Rudolf Bultmann. And Bultmann said that scripture has a kernel of truth, a kernel of history that's wrapped in a shell of pre-modern myth. And so the goal of modern interpreters is to strip off the myth, to strip off the shell, to find that kernel of truth that lies beneath. So Bultmann would Cast aside things like miracles, things, uh, like, uh, the resurrection, things like that, that are in scripture. We would say those aren't true, uh, That's just the way people in a pre-modern society understood the world. That was the best they could do. None of that stuff is true. What's true is there's this kind of kernel of truth that lies beneath all of this fanciful miracles and miraculous stuff. And so Bultmann would say, that's what, when we read scripture, we're trying to get after that kind of kernel of truth that lies somewhere down there. So that's why it's called D mythological. Uh, he tried to strip back what he called myth. which would be things like miracles anything that was miraculous that's myth not true we've got to strip that away get rid of it and whatever we're left with is kind of that kernel of truth that's left behind so again you've got a lot of error In scripture, pretty much anything miraculous in Bultmann's view is, that's not exactly what happened. We got to get rid of that and just deal with what's left over. Um, I've got a bit of an issue with uh, Rudolph there having problem with mythology, I think he lacks, I think he's a little biased because of his name, uh, being connected to the Santa mythos and all of that, so. Maybe there's some truth there. Yeah, maybe. What's the kernel of truth in the, in that story here? Um, okay, so there you have it. Five theories of inspiration. Again, Spencer said not Running the gambit, not all of

them, but kind of covering, uh, various views. Obviously you can see how we got from a robot view to, to Rudolph view there. Uh, how different those two are and then the stuff that you have kind of in between, uh, in all of that. So I like what you just said, robot to Rudolph. Robot to Rudolph. Uh, that's. That's catchy. We may have to capitalize on that. Get it on a shirt or something. Maybe a mug. Robot with like the blinking red light on top of the antenna and then Rudolph with the blinking red nose. Right. Robot. That's a Christmas mug. There you go. Um, maybe someday, uh, Spencer encouraged before he started going through these, you may have the one that you're like, this, this is where I'm at. And it's not that that's an issue. I hope that you'd have some thought on this prior to going into the discussion, but. With each of these views, uh, stop, hear them out, uh, make your pros and cons even of the one that you hold to and say, well, here are maybe some potential problems. Here are why I don't think those are actual problems, et cetera, whatever. But hold on to these five as we go through this and the next episode and we'll unpack those things more and then we will at the very end, you know, arrive at kind of our conclusions on this sort of stuff. And, uh, hopefully you will too here. All right. The second half of this, uh, the second half of this episode today. Uh, what is scripture trying to do? What's its, what's its purpose? Because if we're going to think about what inspiration is, uh, we need to understand a little bit. What is scripture trying to do for us in the lives of the reader, the audience that was written to, from the writer, from the author, God, and all of this? What's the purpose? And then from there we can figure out, okay, well, how do we uncover the truths, the purpose, and all of that in our reading? What inspiration works best? Uh, so Spencer, go ahead and get started on, uh, what is the purpose of scripture from a theological standpoint here? Yeah, so like you said, this is so important because our view of inspiration has to fit with the purpose of scripture and I think that tends to be the biggest mistake we make is a lot of the times we start with inspiration and then we, we build from what the way that we think scripture is inspired. We build off of that, what we think the purpose of scripture is. When it should be the other way. We need to go to Scripture and say, what is Scripture trying to do? And then based on what Scripture is trying to do, move from there to understanding how Scripture might or might not be inspired. I was actually, right before we were recording, I was on Twitter, um, and Michael Bird, I don't know if any of you know, he's in, I believe, Australian Theologian. I think he's from Australia. He wrote a book recently, co-authored a book recently with N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and Its World*. Yep. Um, and he's an evangelical. He believes in inspiration of scripture. He believes in the inerrancy of scripture. Uh, but he wrote an article criticizing American Evangelicals in the way they approach inspiration. And that's what he accuses American Christians of doing is starting with Mm-hmm. And building our theology from what the way we think scripture should be inspired instead of starting with Jesus. And then moving there to the purpose of scripture. And then from there talking about inspiration, which is what we're going to try to do. Um, in this episode and the next one is start here with figuring out what's scriptures trying to do so that we can move from there and then develop. An idea of how scripture may be inspired. So the important thing to remember is that scripture is primarily theological. That is scripture is primarily about God. It's primarily trying to tell us something about God. And so scripture is not primarily historical or scientific. Is there history in the Bible? Absolutely. But the primary point of that history being told is not to say something historical, but it's to say something about God. The reason the Old Testament records the story of the Exodus is not so Israelites will have written down for them this historical account of the Exodus. But it's so the people of Israel could understand themselves as the people of God who have, who God himself freed from slavery and called out and set apart as his own people. That's the point of that story. It helps Israel understand who they are as the people of God. Its primary purpose is not to record history. But to tell Israel something about who God is and even as us as modern readers to tell us something about who God is. And I think you see that in the fact that the original authors wrote based upon their knowledge of the universe. So if you read the Old Testament, for example, it's built upon a cosmology or a view of the universe that you've got the earth. And the earth is held up by these, the earth and the sky are held up by these pillars. The sky is held up by the mountains was a common way to think. You've got the firmament up at the top that's held up by these things. If you go up far enough, you get to heaven, the place where God is. That's why people tried to build the Tower of Babel, the beginning of Genesis, reach up to God. If you go, if you were to dig down into the earth and go down far enough, You would arrive at Sheol, the place of the dead, the place where all dead people go. And we see that over that view of the universe over and over and over in the Old Testament. Because the authors are talking about what they see and what they're experiencing based on the knowledge they have of the world, the way they see the world, but that's not the point of what they're writing. The point of what they're writing is to say something about God. None of that other stuff matters. I think of one of the Psalms where you talk about the mountains being moved into the heart of the sea and the sky falling. Right? Because that's the way that they viewed the world. You take away

the mountains, the sky falls. But the point of that psalm is not whether or not that would actually happen. The point is, is that God's in control. Right? God's there. That's the psalm that ends with be still and know that I am God. In the midst of catastrophe, realize that I'm the God of the universe and I'm in control. That's the point. That's what Scripture is trying to do. And so when we understand that Scripture is primarily theological, it's primarily trying to tell us something about God, and then When we think about how things like history and scripture fit in to this primary purpose, It forces us to realize that, yes, there's history in the Bible, and there are certain historical truths that are necessary For the theological implications of scripture. So if scripture is primarily theological, there are certain things that have to have historically happened or the theology of scripture falls apart. But there are other things that did not historically have to happen for the theological point of Scripture to stand. And here are some examples of what I mean. Things that are necessary. That God created the universe, Genesis one and two right? If God didn't create everything, if everything doesn't find its existence From God, then scripture falls apart. Our theology falls apart. Our belief about God falls apart, right? That has to be historically true. That God created everything. That everything comes from God. We think about stories such as Abraham. Abraham is where the whole biblical story starts in Genesis chapter twelve Abraham had to be real. That story has to be real. Moses. The exodus is central to how Israel understood themselves. The exodus is central to how the New Testament talks about Jesus and God's story. It's amazing how You hear echoes of the Exodus in Matthew's Gospel, for example, all throughout Paul's letters. Even if it's not explicit, you see these echoes to this idea of exodus and Jesus providing a new exodus uh, has to be historical otherwise our theology falls apart. Jesus Jesus had to be real, he had to have walked the earth, he had to have died on a cross, and he had to be raised from the dead. Otherwise, our entire faith crumbles. Jesus is the most important thing that has to be historically true. Because otherwise, we have no faith. Paul says to the Corinthians that if Jesus wasn't raised from the dead, if there is no resurrection, then our faith is pointless. It's void. It's useless. We might as well give it up and go spend our time doing something else. So we have these things that have to have historically happened. But there are other things in Scripture that sometimes we think have to have historically happened that are unnecessary for the theological point of Scripture. It's not that they didn't happen. But I think I would argue that we might be better spent doing other things than arguing about whether or not these things historically happened because it doesn't change. The theological point that scripture is trying to make. Some examples of this is like the seven literal days of creation. Was it seven literal days? Was it seven periods of time? Uh, was it thousands of years? Was it millions of years? Was it billions of years? We argue about those kinds of things. But the point of Genesis one and two is not to try to tell us the time period of creation, but it's trying to tell us something about God. It's telling us that God is the creator. That everything comes from him. It tells us, it's trying to make the point that all human beings were created in his image. It shows us that God is powerful enough to create just by speaking. Which is unlike all the other gods of the nations around Israel who have creation stories about gods defeating monsters and doing all these kinds of things. God didn't have to do that. That's the point. Genesis one and two We have other stories of, sometimes we want to debate, well, did Noah and the flood really happen? If so, um, How big was the flood? Was it just a localized flood? Was it a worldwide flood? Again, that's not the point of the story. It doesn't matter Whether it happened or didn't, we're missing the point. Jonah's another example. Was he really swallowed by the fish? Not the point of Jonah. Job. Was Job a real person? Is this just a story of a righteous sufferer? Again, it probably doesn't matter. And I think this is the point that I would want to make. If we're studying Jonah, for example, and we spend all of our time trying to prove that this story has really happened, we've missed the point of Jonah. We've missed it. Yeah. Because that's not the point. The point of Jonah is to tell us something about God. That's what scripture is trying to do. And so there's certain things in scripture that I think we have to hold on to and say, yes, this had happened. to have historically happened. Otherwise, the entire theology of scripture falls apart. But there's other things that I think we can be a little more loose on and say, well, Yes, I may believe that that's historical. I may believe that the story of Jonah happened exactly like it did, but it didn't have to. This could just be a story much like Jesus parables. That's not trying to tell us of a, about an historical event, but it's trying to tell us something about God. And that's the point that, that I would want to make is even if you said like Jonah didn't happen, you don't have to say, well, scripture is lying. I think the place that you would go is just simply to say, well, it's a story like a children's storybook. But that's trying to teach something, right? If you have children, you probably read them books that aren't true but have a message, have some kind of moral message that they're trying to get across that's teaching the child something. Right. The point of that story book is not whether or not the story actually happened, but it's the message of the story. And that very well could be the case with stories such as Noah or Jonah or Job. The theological implications of scripture don't fall apart. Depending on

where you fall on those things. So I would just kind of encourage open your mind. Don't discount and call someone a heretic because. They think Jonah's more of a parable than a historical event. It doesn't change what scripture's trying to do. Yeah, the, the, the point is the point, um, regardless there. And again, we're not saying, uh, we're not saying really either way on the unnecessary as far as what we exactly believe about that. That's not the point of what we're talking about. The point of what we're talking about here is, okay, does it, does it matter if it's literal seven days or if it's one of the many theories advanced about the creation week and all of that? No, the, the point still stands regardless, uh, of what that narrative is trying to get across to us. And so, That takes a little more work. It's a lot easier to kind of blanket, it is much easier to blanket statement something and just go, I believe this about all of the text and so this is how it needs to work. And then that's when we get caught up in the, well, I don't think that's how it works. Well, now I'm going to prove to you why this is how it, and in those conversations we're getting lost in Improving things that, as Spencer said here, is that really necessary to the purpose? Isn't the point still there either way? Can't we talk about the point and focus on the point? Uh, and prove the point, um, uh, if we're going to prove anything. So, all right. That's, that's the first part of. Next, we have God and His nature and how that's involved in the purpose of Scripture. Spencer, talk to us a little bit about that. When we were talking about The Trinity, a few episodes ago, one of the things we talked about is how God, by his very nature, is beyond our human understanding and language. God could be fully understood and explained by us. He wouldn't be God. And so God has to be beyond our human understanding. And beyond our human language. And this means that even scripture is unable to fully encapsulate God. If God is beyond our language, if our language, if human language can begin to say something about God, but not fully encapsulate God. Then scripture has, as something written in human language, has to be something that can begin to say something about God. And begin to understand God, but will never be able to fully encapsulate who God is. God is always going to be bigger than scripture because God is bigger than human language and he's bigger than human understanding. Something else that we've also talked about in multiple episodes is that because of this, God is only able to be known through the ways he has revealed himself to humankind. So We only know God through the ways that God has revealed himself to us. If God didn't reveal himself at all to humanity, then we wouldn't know or be able to say anything about God. And so the only things we do know and the only things we can say about God Is through the ways that God has revealed himself. So for example, uh, scripture talks about how God has revealed himself through creation, the things that he's created. So we can look at creation and know a little something about God. Because God has revealed himself to us through the creation. We've talked about how the pinnacle of God's self-revelation is Jesus. Because Jesus is God. Jesus was God walking with human beings. And so our understanding of God has to begin with Jesus. And move out from there because we know God most fully and completely in Jesus. Jesus is the pinnacle. of God revealing himself to human beings. And so when we take that and then begin to look at what scripture is doing, I think what we see is that scripture is the human witness authorized by God To the ways God has revealed himself in human history through his interactions with humanity. The pinnacle being his ultimate self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Now there, I want to break that up a little bit real quick. So we're saying that scripture is the human being. Witness to the ways God has revealed himself in human history through his interactions with humanity. Is at least to one extent a human product. It's not completely human, but human beings put pen to paper. Right. And what they're doing is in the best way they can, they are witnessing. To the ways God has interacted with human beings, the things that God has done in the world. That's what the writers of Scripture are doing. So you think about stories in the Old Testament, like the Exodus. What is the Old Testament writer doing? Witnessing to what God has done. God had, God has done this. I am a witness to it. Let me tell you what God has done. That's what scripture from Genesis to Revelation is. It's human beings witnessing God. To the way God has acted in the world. But the important thing is, is that by believing that scripture is inspired is to believe that it's not totally human, but that God played a role in it. Right. And so while scripture may be a human witness to the activity of God, it's a human witness that is authorized by God. I like to think of scripture as God put his stamp of approval. On these human witnesses, right? That's what's the difference between me writing something and saying, hey, this is how I have experienced God in my life. Right? That may be true, but it's not authorized by God in the same way that scripture is. God hasn't put his stamp of approval on what I've said, but he has on the sixty-six books that we have in the Bible. Which is to say that these are the books that God wanted us to have. These are the books that God desires for us to look to to learn about Him. These are the, the witnesses that God has authorized as authoritative for his people. You know, some people discuss about how, like, for example, we know that there were other letters that Paul wrote. Right? There was, our first Corinthians isn't first Corinthians. There was a letter before that, that Paul references in first Corinthians. Um, we have references

to Paul writing a letter to the Laodiceans. Which could be actually the letter to the Ephesians, but that's a different discussion. Yeah, different episode. The point is, people have asked, well, what happens if we find that? What happens if someone digging finds the true first Corinthians? Do we add that to the Bible? And my answer is no. Because throughout the history of the church, God has provided us with the sixty-six books that we currently have and authorized them as this is what I want you to have. This is what you need. To be my people is kind of what God's stamp of approval or of authorization means. But the pinnacle Again, the ultimate self-revelation of God where anything we say about God starts is in Jesus. And so the entire story of scripture The Old Testament culminates in Jesus, the Gospels tell us about Jesus, and the letters reflect back upon Jesus. It all starts with Jesus. So even our understanding of scripture and what scripture is telling us has to begin with Jesus because scripture is a human witness that's authorized by God, but it's a witness to the way that God has revealed himself. In history, through his interactions with humanity, it's a witness to what God has done in the world and what that tells us about God with the pinnacle or ultimate self-revelation being Jesus, that being the place that we have to start. And that's what scripture witnesses to God's work in the world and God's work most fully in Jesus. And so what that means is Is that when we read scripture, we encounter God more fully, right? I mentioned we can learn some things about God. We can see God in other people. We can see God in creation. But we begin to encounter and understand God more fully through scripture. And I would also want to add, and the church, the people of God. Which is kind of the authorized group of God, if you will. But we're talking about scripture. Because in scripture we have people witnessing to what God has done. How God has revealed himself through creation, through the Exodus, through Israel. Most importantly, we have how God has revealed himself in Jesus and we have witnesses to what that was and what that looked like. And because of that, we encounter and know God more fully than we can anywhere else, I believe, through Scripture and then secondarily through the church, which is the group of people that Scripture creates. And with that, I want to say we have to recognize the role of the Holy Spirit in all this, not just inspiring scripture, but we have to remember that the Holy Spirit still works in us and in the church today. And so the Spirit is active when we're reading and interpreting and applying Scripture. So I think as we read scripture, we not only encounter God more fully through what scripture says, but also the way that the spirit works in us. As we're reading and interpreting those witnesses, right? It's not static, right? Uh, the Holy Spirit didn't just inspire and we have this word and that's it and there's nothing more to it. Yes, the Spirit, I think, was behind inspiring that, but it's also at work when we're reading and understanding Scripture. Yeah. Yeah. Um, so understanding how God works and, uh, how he has revealed himself. Uh, you, you mentioned the canon and all of these things are sixty-six books and all of that. Uh, that we have, uh, what we need, those things reveal to us in the, in the best way that our language can encapsulate God. Reveals to us who God is. But ultimately those things are gonna fall short. When you were talking about that, I was thinking of Revelation and the description of heaven or we sing these in our songs as well but we think about the jewels that are used to describe The layout, we say the pearly gates, uh, streets of gold and that sort of thing. Was it literally those things? Or is that the best... Like, because obviously we think when we hear those things, we go, oh, wow, you know, that's incredible. These precious stones and that's going to be what the formation of this. Thing is and all that. That's one of those, uh, is it necessary to believe that that's literally how it's going to be or, uh, is it? Uh, or is it unnecessary? Do we have to think in those terms? Are they just words that God used to, in the best way that he could, through our language, describe This is where I'm at. This is where you'll be. And this is what it's like. Um, so I, I think maybe at first, uh, if some of these ideas you might have trouble Gelling with, potentially, uh, as listeners here and going, I'm not so sure about that, but we have things. I guarantee you there are texts where you kind of look at it and go. Okay, yeah, you know, I get where, I get where that's coming from as far as word usage and what's said here and there and uh, how our language is limited and what it can explain about God. And I think your point in Revelation and the description of heaven is great because I think most people would say, yeah, there's something... Metaphorical going on there, right? It's not completely literal and it doesn't have to be because that's not the point, right? And one problem I think we get in sometimes when we talk about inspiration is. We're really good at just picking and choosing what we want to take as metaphorical and what we say has to be historically true. Right. Um, and we just kind of pick and choose what we want those things to be, which is kind of just what I want to push back against by not saying that some of these things aren't true. Like, I'm, I'm, I'm not saying that Jonah's, uh, has to not be true. I'm also, I'm just saying it doesn't have to be true, right? The streets of gold. Could be true. It could not be true. Right. But that's not the point. And we can't just pick and choose what we want to say. Well, that has to be true. And what we want to say, well, that could be metaphorical. That's not quite the way that. That things work. And that's not thinking theologically, right? We do the same thing with things in the New Testament that

we say, well, that was cultural. Right? Why don't we greet each other with a holy kiss? Well, we say, well, that was cultural. Well, so was baptism. Christians didn't invent baptism. Every... Cult, religious cult of the first century practiced baptism very similar to what Christians did. Jews did it too. Christians stole it. We stole baptism. That does not negate the significance of baptism. It doesn't negate what Paul says in Romans six that we are united with Christ through baptism. But if you just want to say, well, culture Well, I could say that about baptism because it was, it was cultural. Yeah. But I'm not saying we throw out baptism, but I am saying I don't think I don't think women need to cover their heads or we have to greet each other with a holy kiss. But I get there by thinking theologically. What's the theological thing going on here? And we have to do that with History, metaphor, all those different kinds of things is think in a different way, which is why we have this podcast called Thinking Theologically. That's what we're trying to do is think theologically, think in a different way. I think you can see now why this is, uh, gonna be a two-parter cause we're running up against it here, but we still got just a tiny bit left here, uh, as we close, uh, this stuff off talking about God and his revealing to us what the, what the purpose of all of that is. Which is ultimately going to give us the, you know, what's the purpose of scripture? Well, if it's revealing God and pointing us to this specific thing, what was that thing? Why did God come? Why did he... Why did he tell us about himself and do these things and send Jesus and all of this? Yeah, so this would just kind of summarize what we've talked about. If scripture is primarily theological, it's saying something about God. Specifically, it's revealing God to us. It's witnessing to what God has done in the world that tells us something about who God is. Then the purpose of God's self-revelation in scripture is to put the entire creation to rights and to enter into an eternal relationship with humanity. So what scripture is doing in witnessing to God's self-revelation, God's works in history, is that scripture is witnessing to a bigger story than that which is contained in its pages. There's something bigger going on, right? And we could say that what Scripture is doing is it's witnessing to the story of salvation, but we need to make sure that our term salvation is big enough. A salvation in scripture is not just an individual thing. It's not just about me. It's not about me escaping the world to get to heaven. Salvation is about God making the entire creation right. Transforming the entire creation to be what God created and designed it at the very beginning to be. And that includes me. And you, because God wants to enter into a relationship with us. But the idea of salvation in scripture is bigger. And so we have this grand story. That begins at creation and ends in the new creation. It ends in, in heaven. We have this big story that God's been working out ever since the very beginning. And as scripture witnesses to God's self-revelation, God's self-revealing acts in history, it's witnessing to this bigger story. And it's a story that is bigger than just the words that we have contained in the Bible because it's a story that is still going on. It's a story that is still happening. The victory in Christ has been won, but it's yet to fully come to fruition. In Christ, God has conquered the powers of sin and death and of evil and is in the process of making the world right. And it's this story that scripture is witnessing to. And so once again, scripture is not primarily here to provide us with a textbook of historical or scientific information, but it's to witness to the story of God. And at the center of that story is Jesus. The entire story hinges and circles and is built upon Jesus. Because in Jesus, God is putting the entire creation to rights. He's transforming. All of creation to be what he created and designed it to be. And so through pointing to God's grand story, what, uh, Scripture is doing and pointing to this story and pointing to God's plan for the entire creation is we also find out how we take part in this plan. I think, and we're going to talk about this more, uh, in the next episode, but what it means to be obedient, to follow God, to follow Jesus is to take part in God's story. To be a part of God's plan. It's not to follow a set of rules to do this and don't do that. It's to be a part of God's story. Which does mean that we do things and don't do other things. But there's something bigger that's going on. Again, scripture's not just giving us the rules of do's and don'ts. It's telling us the story of God. And it's inviting us to become a part of that story. The story from creation to new creation in light of the cross, Jesus stands at the beginning. And so even if. We want to say that every word is inspired by God and there's a couple ways we could get there as we were talking about the theories at the beginning. So even if we want to say that every single word in scripture, no matter how important, is inspired by God. We still have to realize that the true inspiration is found in the meaning of the words for the salvation of the entire cosmos, of the entire creation. Right. Cause there's something bigger that scripture is pointing us to. And that kind of goes back to, we did that episode about worshiping the Bible and how the point of the Bible isn't the Bible, but it's to point us to God. It's so that we can encounter God. It's so that we can be transformed to look like Jesus. And so the true inspiration of Scripture, even if every word is hand-chosen by God, The true purpose and the true inspiration is still how it witnesses to this bigger story. How it tells us about what God is doing in the world and how we as followers of Jesus take part in that. And so we're going to talk more in the next episode about the authority that comes with Scripture. But when we realize this, we also have to realize that the authority of Scripture is not in the words, but the

authority Uh, is in the God whom the words point us towards. Right? So the authority isn't in saying that, well, scripture says this. That's great. That's not where the authority is found. The reason those words have any authority is because of how they reveal to us something about God. And how they fit into God's overall story, right? And so again, I want to bring up Well, why don't we greet each other with a holy kiss or women wear head coverings or something like that? My argument is rooted in asking the question, how does that fit into the story of God that scripture is witnessing to? And that's where I say, I don't think it does. And so I'm going to say there's something, yes, there's something cultural for that time that's going on there. Whereas something like baptism. Man, does that fit into the story of God. We're reenacting in baptism the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, which is the foundation of the entire story. You take away the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, the story falls apart. Right. So it's only because of what baptism... Baptism is so tied to the very core of the story that there's no way... That we could ever get rid of that or toss it aside or explain it away or anything like that. So scripture is doing something It's witnessing to God's self-revealing acts in history and through that it's telling us the story of God and how we take part in that story and that all hinges on and turns around Jesus. Jesus is the ultimate self-revelation of God. Jesus is who begins to transform the world. Jesus is the foundation of the story of God. And so, once again, Scripture is theological. It's saying something about God. It's witnessing to this story. It's not trying to do other things. And so as we continue to develop an idea of how inspiration works, it has to be built on the foundation of what scripture is trying to do. And that is witness to the story of God and Jesus. I've got nothing to add to that episode for today, but we will have more to add to this here in the next episode. We've only just begun. To talk about inspiration here and we'll have a lot more for you on the next episode. If you have any thoughts about this one, you can send those to us on Facebook. You can get to Spencer on Twitter as well or email us at strongchurchministries at gmail.com. That's what we got. I think it was good. Long episode, even more to cover on this next one. Hope you enjoy it. And if we don't see you before the holidays, have a great Thanksgiving and we'll get to you afterwards. I'm Jack, and that's Spencer, and we'll see you next time.