In his recent series on The Gospel Coalition, Pastor Matt Recker devoted an entire essay to the doctrine of Scripture. Pointing to a 1956 article in *Christian Life* magazine, he noted that one element in the development of New Evangelicalism was a “re-opening of the subject of biblical inspiration.” He argued that this re-opening led some evangelicals to question the doctrine of inerrancy by the mid-1970s. According to Pastor Recker, certain statements by Gospel Coalition leaders, as well as certain sections of its foundation statements, are analogous to the flawed approach of the New Evangelicalism.

Few questions could be more important for faith and practice than the question, “By what authority?” This question goes to the heart of the matter—is the Bible a trustworthy authority, and if so, how and for what? Even fundamentalists have experienced disputes over these questions. Consequently, a review of the Bible’s teaching concerning inspiration and inerrancy is a necessary background for responding either to the statements of The Gospel Coalition or to Pastor Recker’s criticisms.

The only text that explicitly mentions the inspiration of Scripture is 2 Timothy 3:16-17, which states that “Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for child-training in righteousness, in order that the man of God might be complete, equipped for every good work.” The grammar of this verse is controversial. It states a subject (“Scripture”), but only implies a verb. Since the verb is left unstated, scholars have debated whether the adjective “God-breathed” (*theopneustos*) stands in the attributive or predicate position. In other words, the question is whether the verse should read, “Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable,” or whether it should read, “Every God-breathed Scripture is also profitable.” The latter (attributive) translation is followed by the English Revised Version and by the American Standard Version of 1901.

In an article on “The Relation of *[Theopneustos] to [Graphe]* in 2 Timothy 3:16,” Daniel B. Wallace advances evidence that strongly favors translating *theopneustos* as a predicate adjective. If Wallace is right (and he almost certainly is), then the verse leaves no room for any Scripture that is not God-breathed (*theopneustos*). To say that Scripture is God-breathed is to say...
that it is wholly the product of God. It comes from Him. No Scripture—indeed, no part of Scripture—can be viewed as a merely human production. While Scripture is also human (more on this later) it is never less than fully the Word of God.

If every Scripture is God-breathed, then every Scripture also comes with complete divine authority. The words of Moses and Paul are just as authoritative as the words of Jesus. The narrative of Jonah is just as authoritative as the words thundered from Sinai. Every Scripture—every story, poem, parable, genealogy, and epistle—is from God.

If every Scripture is God-breathed, then inspiration terminates in the writings. The Bible never talks about inspired authors, only inspired writings. One of the least fortunate locutions of the old New Hampshire Confession was its affirmation that the Holy Bible was “written by men divinely inspired.” The men were not inspired—the writings were.

Furthermore, if the writings are the locus of inspiration, then the doctrine of inspiration is about a result and not about a process. The doctrine of inspiration does not say how every Scripture came to be God-breathed. It simply states the result: every Scripture is God-breathed. Speculative constructs such as the so-called mechanical or dictation theory of inspiration are never taught by the Bible itself. They are human guesses (and bad ones, too) about how an inspired text might be possible.

If inspiration terminates in the text, then the very words of Scripture must be inspired. The so-called dynamic theory of inspiration suggests that God inspired the thoughts of the writers, who then cast those thoughts in their own (perhaps fallible) language. Like the dictation theory, the dynamic theory is a speculation about how the text came to be inspired. The dynamic theory does even more damage than the dictation theory to the doctrine of inspiration. A text is not possible without words. Consequently, a God-breathed text is not possible without God-breathed words. Verbal inspiration is a corollary of the proposition that every Scripture is God-breathed.

Another corollary of inspiration is the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. The Bible is the Word of God. What it affirms, God affirms. By His very nature, God can neither err nor deceive. Since the Bible is His breath and His Word, it never affirms error and it never deceives. Whatever it says is utterly trustworthy, just as it is wholly authoritative.

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul further describes the ways in which inspired Scripture is profitable. It tells people what God wants them to believe and to do, it shows them where they are wrong, it tells them how to become right, and it provides training in righteousness. Paul ties the profitability and inspiration of Scripture together—every Scripture is inspired and profitable in exactly these ways.

Furthermore, Scripture is sufficient for faith and obedience. It has the power to make people of God complete. It fully equips humans for every good work. No other authority is necessary for living the life of faith. Indeed, no other authority is possible, for Scripture mediates to humans the authority of God Himself. To set some other authority alongside Scripture is to set it alongside God Himself.

To obey Scripture is to obey God. To exalt Scripture is to exalt the God whose Word it is. While the Bible certainly displays a human side, its humanity never detracts from its divine origin or authority. It is always the Word of God, and God honors His Word as He does His name (Ps. 138:2). The Bible is a trustworthy authority, speaking without error in all that it affirms.

What of the humanity of the Bible? A biblical doctrine of Scripture must also take account of the human agents through whom the text was produced. Furthermore, it must offer some explanation of the relationship of the human to the divine within Scripture. These matters will occupy future essays.