

Chapter Two

Revelation, Inspiration, Infallibility, Inerrancy: What Do They Mean?

When I was a teenager things were much simpler. I grew up in the city of Philadelphia, and knew what hoagies and submarines were. I will admit that one time in downtown Baltimore I saw a sign advertising "heroes." and was puzzled for a short while. But when I learned what heroes were, I quickly assimilated that bit of information. I will also admit that when I traveled to Boston with my drum and bugle corps for the national competition and heard about "tonics" and "frappes" I was stumped until some admiring girl spectators explained what these exotic words meant. And then I understood immediately. Ah. things were much simpler when I was young!

Nowadays things seem to have become much more complicated. Take, for example, this present subject. When I was a greenhorn in college, I knew what inspiration and infallibility and inerrancy meant, and all my classmates also knew what they meant. We had to know because we were asked questions about these things on tests! Today a number of evangelical Christians don't seem to know what they mean. Or at least some Christians mean something quite different from what other Christians mean when they use these terms.

By the way, lest any of you become so distracted wondering what the terms "hoagies," "submarines," "heroes," "tonics," and "frappes" mean that you miss the rest of what I hope to communicate in this paper, permit me to translate for those of you who need translation. Hoagies, submarines and heroes are (large, Italian) sandwiches, tonics are soft drinks like Coke or Seven-Up, and frappes are thick milkshakes.

But to get back to the topic at hand, let us expand the subject matter a bit to include a few other terms like "verbal" and "plenary" in association with inspiration. And let us ask not only what these terms mean and have come to mean, but also what are some of the problems which some evangelicals have been having with these terms and meanings.

Accordingly, I propose that we take up the following terms in this order: (1) "revelation," (2) "inspiration," (3) "verbal inspiration," (4) "plenary inspiration," (5) "infallibility," and (6) "inerrancy."