



# Can We Trust the Bible?

2 Timothy 3:16-17

The word picture here is of training a child. It is the image of training a child how to live in this world. Training a child so she can function and be successful and useful. The Bible trains us in the same way to live lives that are pleasing to God. Now when we think about training, we realize that training is more than one session. Training is a process and training builds one session upon another. So, it is with God's word. Training with God's word is not to read it once in a while. It is not to just read it when we are troubled. It is not to read it only in Sunday School or in worship. It is to read it in a systematic way so that it can train us to live as God intends.

Let me suggest four ways to read God's word. One read it devotionally. That is spend time daily just reading a few verses and reflect on them. Think about them. What is God saying to me in these verses? Read it critically. Now that sounds odd, but what I mean is read it as to study it. Maybe read a book of the Bible and in doing so read background information, get a good Study Bible or Online Commentary or Bible Dictionary. Study the context of the passage. Gain understanding. Read it with others. We need to study God's word together. We gain understanding from each other. Finally, read it prayerfully. We need to learn to pray the scriptures. When we read the Bible we might respond in prayer by forming a prayer that pertains to what we read.

Finally, Paul reminds us that the scriptures prepare us for what is ahead. Paul tells the young pastor Timothy the Bible will thoroughly equip him for every good work. The Bible not only teaches us, corrects us and trains us for what we are going through but it can also prepare us for that which is yet to occur.

God's word will prepare us to resist temptation. God's word will prepare us to seek God when we need wisdom. God's word will prepare us for when we have those thorns in the flesh that become a part of life. God's word prepares us living and for dying and eternity. God's word prepares us for what is yet to come.

Soren Kierkegaard once wrote:

"The matter is quite simple. The Bible is very easy to understand. But we Christians are a bunch of scheming swindlers. We pretend to be unable to understand it because we know very well that the minute we understand, we are obliged to act accordingly. Take

any words in the New Testament and forget everything except pledging yourself to act accordingly. My God, you will say, if I do that my whole life will be ruined. How would I ever get on in the world?... Dreadful it is to fall into the hands of the living God. Yes it is even dreadful to be alone with the New Testament."

The Bible is God's word and is to be read, believed and applied to our lives. There is an ancient term, which is adiaphora, which means debatable matters. There are subjects which the church has said are adiaphora. There are essentials to our faith and salvation and there are other matters, which are debatable from scripture. The truth is we spend too much time on the non-essentials and not on the essentials. It is one of the ways we avoid truly being transformed by the Holy Spirit.

What would happen if the church decided not to spend time on the debatable matters but focused on the essentials? What would the church look like if we placed others before self? What would the world look like if we loved our neighbor and prayed for our enemies? What would we be like if we believed the Bible, read the Bible, and lived in obedience to the commands of God in the Bible?

Darrell Bock states, "The Bible has gone from being the answer to being the question in our culture. Can I still believe what it claims?" Can we trust the Bible? Today I say with great confidence you can believe and trust the Bible. It is God inspired and it is useful for training you and me in holy living. This is God's word... read it, believe it, and live it.



<sup>1</sup>Craig Blomberg "Can We Still Believe the Bible" (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press) 2014. 225.

<sup>2</sup>N.T. Wright "Scripture and the Authority of God" (London: Harper Collins) 2011. 85-86.

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TRINITY PULPIT

In most Baptist churches there has traditionally been a Lord's Supper Table and on that table in the center is an open Bible. The open Bible as the center focus of the worship space is not simply for decoration, but rather for its declaration. Baptists have always been "people of the book." The Bible opened and sitting in a place of prominence has been a way of proclaiming that as we gather for worship, we do so not only aware we are in the presence of God, but also that we are seeking a word from God. That word is found in the reading, hearing, teaching and preaching of the written word of God... the Bible. We open the Bible and in that same moment we open our minds and our hearts to listen to its words. We believe that when the Bible speaks, God speaks.

However, in recent years the prominence of the Bible has diminished. It has diminished not only in our culture, but also even in the church itself. Interestingly the Bible is diminished by several fronts in the life of the church. In some congregations, that claim to "believe the Bible" and have a very conservative statement about the Bible, it is hard to find a Bible. There will not be one visible in the worship space and a worship service can occur with very little reference to the Bible if any. There, of course, might be a great sermon on 10 ways to be a better parent, spouse or employee or how to date as a Christian person, but what is missing in many of this good advice is God's word.

Those who would use it as a reference for their own political agenda have diminished the Bible. In this case, the Bible is not a transformative but rather instead one uses the Bible as a proof text for an already galvanized set of values. Values that many times have more to do with personal bias or economic gain and not the Kingdom of God. This misuse of the Bible can be discovered all across the spectrum from the progressive left to the extreme right and more subtly by those of us in between.

The Bible is diminished by misuse, but also "no use." The lack of true Biblical knowledge is alarming not only outside the church, but inside the church as well. If I asked you to turn to Second Consolation (tongue and cheek) would you know where to begin in your Bible?

Those who would seek to undermine its authority, due to textual study of course have diminished the Bible. In his book "Can We Still Believe the Bible?", Craig Blomberg of Denver Seminary addresses six assertions, which have diminished the Bible's authority. An excellent Biblical Scholar, Dr. Blomberg answers these questions regarding the Bible:

1. Aren't the Copies of the Bible Hopelessly Corrupt?
2. Wasn't the selection of the Books for the Cannon Just Political?
3. Can we Trust Any of our Translations of the Bible?
4. Don't These Issues Rule out Biblical Inerrancy?
5. Aren't Several Narrative Genres of the Bible Unhistorical?
6. Don't all the Miracles Make the Bible Mythical?

One by one, Dr. Blomberg addresses these questions with an honest assessment of the Biblical text and scholarship. Concluding that he is convinced more than ever that the scriptures are trustworthy and we can still believe the Bible. His final statement is "We should still believe the Bible and act accordingly, by following Jesus in discipleship."<sup>1</sup>

Can we trust the Bible? Just as important, do we allow the Bible to teach us and train us in holy living? Paul's writing to young Timothy makes a great claim about the scriptures as he reminds Timothy that he had received instruction in the scriptures, since he was young and that these scriptures were "God breathed" and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training us in righteous living.

We can trust the Bible because it is the inspired word of God. Paul writes, "All scripture is God Breathed." First let's determine what Paul meant by all scripture. He obviously at this point is speaking of the Old Testament writings. This would have been the "holy scriptures" that Paul and Timothy would have had and known. Paul believed that the Hebrew Scriptures not only were God Breathed, but also when properly interpreted would lead to salvation in Jesus Christ. Paul says of these scriptures that they make you wise for salvation in Jesus Christ. Paul is reminding Timothy that Jesus is not a diversion from God's work of salvation and salvation history through God's people Israel, but a fulfillment of this work.

In addition, Paul says that all scripture is God Breathed. There is an inclusion in this statement. It is not some of the scriptures are inspired but "all" scriptures are inspired. Now the argument has been made if Paul was speaking of the Old Testament, then can we now include the gospels as well as Paul's epistles as well as the other New Testament books as inspired? One of the assertions, which diminish the New Testament, is to suggest that the gospel writers, Paul and others were not writing scripture but simply a story and some advice. It has been asserted that the New Testament writers did not know they were writing scripture.

In his book, "Scripture and the Authority of God", N. T. Wright asserts that it may be true that the writers of the New Testament did not write thinking their writing would be collected as it has been collected. However Wright continues:

*"Recent study of the letters, and of the intention of the gospel writers, emphasizes the self-conscious way in which the New Testament authors believed themselves called to exercise their calling as "authorized" teachers, by the guidance and power of the Spirit, writing books and letters to sustain, energize, shape, judge, and renew the church. The apostolic writings, like the "word" which they now wrote down, were not simply about the coming of God's Kingdom into all the world; they were, and were designed to be, part of the means whereby that happened, and whereby those through whom it happened could themselves be transformed into Christ's likeness"... "they were conscious of a unique vocation to write Jesus-shaped, Spirit-led, church-shaping books, as part of their strange first-generation calling, we should not doubt."*

We assert then that although we know Paul in this passage is speaking of the Hebrew Scriptures, we also affirm that the New Testament is too "holy scripture" inspired by God.

Paul contends that God inspires scripture. The word translation is God Breathed. When Paul speaks of inspiration, does he mean this in an active way? Is Paul saying that the Bible inspires us to know about God? Yes, that is true but the assertion that Paul is making is something else. Paul is using the term in a passive way, which means Paul is claiming that God inspired the writing. This type of inspiration means for us that Bible has divine authorship. Now, how did this inspiration occur?

First, we reject the notion that what we mean by inspiration is dictation. That is we reject the concept that God took over the very personality of the writers and simply dictated the scripture and the writer was like a dictation machine without expression. First of all, the Bible does not stand up under the scrutiny that such an idea of inspiration would suggest. Secondly, this is not the character of God. God created us in God's image and with free will and God chooses to work with and through humanity God loves. God does not take over personalities or minds, but alongside and inspiring through the Holy Spirit.

In saying this, we also do not mean that God simply inspired the writers with ideas and some thoughts and all else was left to the writer. Instead, what we mean is that God inspired the writers who used their own language, phrases of speech, genres and words to write the scripture. However, God is a part of each and every word and phrase. In 2 Peter 1:21 we are told that no prophesy is from the will of man, but instead men spoke from God as the Holy Spirit carried them along. This is the picture of inspiration of scripture. It did not originate in the will of man, but instead is a revelation from God and God inspired the writers not only with the ideas, but then carried them along in the writing. This simply means the words of scripture matter like the ideas of scripture.

Thus, as God as the divine author through the power of the Holy Spirit and obedience of the writer, we can say the Bible is trustworthy and true. It is not simply a word about God or contains the word of God, but is the written word of God.

To assert this concept, we have traditionally in Baptist life used two words. One word is inerrancy and the other infallibility. One term means it does not err and the other means it cannot err. Inerrancy is the most debated term in regards to scripture because it means so many different things to people. Some believe it means a biblical literalism and thus ignores the Bible's obvious use of metaphor, imagery, and figurative language. Others reject this word because it has been used as a divisive word in denominational life. That is definitely true in

Southern Baptist life over the last 40 years. Inerrancy, when properly defined and understood, is simply the assertion that the original autographs, when properly translated and interpreted, do not err in what they claim. Inerrancy takes into consideration the lack of precision in some writings of the scripture, metaphors, figurative language, context, and the norm of writing in antiquity when the scriptures were written. I find this term useful as an affirmation of the Bible. The term is actually a statement of faith in the trustworthiness of the Bible.

However, because we do not have the original autographs and there are many qualifiers others choose the word infallibility when referring to the scriptures. Infallibility is the Bible does not err in what it teaches and claims. Infallibility is one of those terms that can be applied to both the original autographs and to the translation I hold in my hand. In the matters of faith and practice, I can know that the Bible will not lead me astray. It has truth without any mixture of error as the Baptist Faith and Message puts it.

There is an old saying that goes "God said it. I believe it. That settles it." The truth is the inspiration of scripture says, "God said it. That settles it." My part of belief is not essential. The Bible stands on its own as God's written word that does not lead us astray.

Paul states the scriptures are inspired, but also useful. How is the Bible useful? First, it is useful in leading us to salvation in Jesus Christ. The primary purpose of the Bible is not simply to give us information about God, but to lead us into a relationship with God. We become as Paul puts it "wise for salvation in Christ Jesus." The Bible tells us that God created all that there is and it was good. God created humanity, but humanity sinned against God. God then began the process that would lead us to salvation and reconciliation. First, with a covenant people, the Israelites, through which he gave the law. Then, by sending His one and only son as part of this covenant to save not only God's chosen nation, but also those of every nation, tribe and people. For God so loved the world.

The Bible reveals to us God's plan of love and salvation that is provided and fulfilled in Jesus. The Bible reminds us that there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved except Jesus. It is the words of scripture that tell us that no one comes to the father

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except through Jesus. The Bible reveals to us the plan of salvation through Jesus. The Bible is God's written word that reveals and points to The Word as John describes Him... Jesus.

The Bible is also useful in teaching us about God and thinking rightly about God and who God is and how God relates to us. Paul writes the scriptures are useful in teaching and rebuking. These terms have to do with sound doctrine. The first is for us to remind ourselves that our teaching and preaching should be based on scripture. Now this does not mean that we will not have different interpretations and disagreements and debate on certain subjects. As Baptists, we believe we each have the ability, responsibility and privilege to read and interpret the Bible. However, what is always important is that we are actually basing our interpretation on the Bible. We can debate and we can disagree on interpretations, but the Bible must be the center of that debate and interpretations. The term rebuking has to do with challenging either another or us in our thinking and interpretation.

When my grandmother was alive, and being the wife of a Baptist preacher, she would always challenge someone if they were making a theological statement. She would always say, "What is your text?" That is the essence of what I am saying in this regard. Our teaching, preaching, interpreting must be on the text. The text must not be the filler or the afterthought.

Paul continues that the Bible is useful for correcting. That sounds negative, but actually this is a positive statement. Let us say you are driving down the road and your mind begins to wonder or you are breaking the law texting or emailing, or you just take your eyes off of the road. Then, for some reason, you notice you are not going where you should be going and you quickly correct your path. That is the term here in this passage. This correction is a positive correction. It is getting back on track. It is heading in the right direction. It is correcting our way. It is easy to get off track everyday. It is easy to take our eyes off Jesus and put them on us or others, or the worries and anxieties of life. Soon we are going in a direction we never intended. The Bible has a way of correcting our way. We read it and we quickly understand there needs to be a correction.

Paul says the Bible is useful in training us in righteousness.