

What We Believe...About The Bible (Part 2) II Timothy 3:16-17

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Last week we began a series of sermons on “what we believe” as Christians about the central matters of our faith. We’re doing this because it’s my firm belief that the era of general acceptance accorded to Christianity by the larger culture is all but over. In the minds of many today, Christianity is to be tolerated as quaint relic of a bygone era, acceptable only if practiced behind the walls of churches but not to be allowed to interfere in public life.

Where all this will lead is anyone’s guess but as tolerance for our faith evaporates and active opposition increases, we better know what it is we stand for, and stand on. And so this series on “what we believe” is designed to remind us of the essentials and why they are important.

Last week we began with a look at the reason God’s people have viewed the Bible as the Word of God. It wasn’t the creation of someone’s imagination; it wasn’t the creation of a church council. The documents that form our Bibles were recognized as divine because they were written by those who were regarded as God’s spokespersons (prophets and apostles) or those near to them, or which were in harmony with their message. And there was an amazing degree of uniformity in which works were seen as divine and which weren’t, so we can have confidence that what is in our Bibles is the Word of God.

But what does the Bible say about itself? What claims does it make about its own character? One thing is clear – the Scriptures maintain that God has spoken to mankind, sometimes directly and sometimes through the written word. Deut. 18:18 says “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; *I will put my words in his mouth*, and he will tell them everything I command him.” This is why the prophet Jeremiah was told at the outset of his ministry in Jer. 1:7 “...You must go to everyone I send you to and *say whatever I command you.*” The King James Version contains the phrase “Thus saith the Lord...” some 413 times, an unmistakable indication that what was recorded was the very words of God. So, it’s obvious that the Bible says it contains God’s communication to us (and this has some implications that we’ll talk about in a minute).

Not only was His communication verbal but at times He had His spokespersons write it out, dictation-style. In Ex. 34:27 we read, “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.’” We could multiply examples of these things many times over.

But it wasn’t just in the OT that God spoke to people or had them write down His message. The prayer of Peter and John in Acts 4:29,31 reveals that they considered

their preaching to consist of God's Word. "[29] Now, Lord, consider their threats and *enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness*....[31] After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *spoke the word of God boldly*." II Peter 3:2 shows that the words of the apostles were viewed on the same authoritative level as the OT prophets. "I want you to recall the *words spoken in the past by the holy prophets* and the command given by our Lord and Savior *through your apostles*." This why the Peter, speaking of the Apostle Paul's writings, says in II Peter 3:16 "...His (Paul's) letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, *as they do the other Scriptures*, to their own destruction." For Peter, what Paul wrote was just as much Scripture as were the OT writings. And in fact, Paul himself said he was speaking for God in I Thess. 2:13, "[13] And we also thank God continually because, when you received *the word of God, which you heard from us*, you accepted it *not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God*, which is at work in you who believe."

The case we're making here is that both the Old and New Testaments claim to be the Words of God, not the creations of someone's imagination. In fact, in II Peter 1:21 it says it just that plainly, "For prophecy *never had its origin in the will of man*, but men spoke from God as they were *carried along by the Holy Spirit*." Sometimes they received God's message in a vision, sometimes verbally but it was always *God's message*.

The Apostle Paul tells us in II Tim. 3:16 "*All Scripture is God-breathed* and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness". That word "God-breathed" has been translated as "inspired" but today, "inspired" can be somewhat misleading because it's often used for amazingly creative works of art or literature. Scripture isn't "inspired" in the sense that the biblical authors wrote wonderfully creative works, it's "inspired" in the sense that God breathed His words into the writers through His Holy Spirit, communicating to them His message. We know that sometimes He dictated the exact words He wanted them to write and at other times He seems to have had them express His message in ways that were natural to them, although always controlled by Him.

What this means is that although the Bible contains the books written by over 40 human authors, it has only *one* ultimate source, God, because He directed them all. This is why its message is so amazingly consistent as it reveals God's plan to redeem the world.

No wonder, then, that we call Scripture "The Holy Bible". As theologian James Packer says, it's not just because it deals with holy things but because it is written by a holy God. And the fact that it was written ultimately by God and not by humans has some important implications.

First and foremost, it's free from error. Faulty, error-prone, sinful men may have been used by God to write it down but *He* made sure what they wrote was without error. Psalm 12:6 "And the words of the LORD are *flawless*, like silver refined in a furnace of

clay, purified seven times.” Prov. 30:5 “*Every word of God is flawless*; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.” Psalm 119:96 “To all perfection I see a limit; *but your commands are boundless*.” This verse is contrasting human perfection with the infinite perfection of God’s Word, which is what Psalm 119 is about.

It only stands to reason, then, that the Bible is free from any error since it was written by a perfect God. But this brings us to our second implication, namely that everything written by a holy and perfect God is perfectly *true*.

Several times in Scripture, such as Numbers 23:19, it tells us that “God is not a man, that He should lie”. People lie all the time but it’s not in God’s nature to speak falsely. In fact, Jesus said in John 17:17 “Sanctify them by the truth; *Your word is truth*.” Because God’s nature is to tell only what is true, it follows that everything He’s said in Scripture is true.

Sometimes even Christians will say something like, “Well, the parts of the Bible that talk about spiritual things are true and without error, but when it comes to other things – historical things, scientific things, the material world, etc. – you can’t really say it’s accurate. But Psalm 119:160 says “*All your words are true*; all your righteous laws are eternal.” Note that it says **ALL** the words, not just some that relate to “spiritual” matters, as opposed to historical, geographical or other matters.

Jesus Himself said in Matt. 5:18 “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” In other words, Jesus believed there was nothing that was unimportant in any part of Scripture, nothing that we could safely ignore because may not have been accurate. And other NT writers referred constantly to historical facts in the OT, large and small. It’s evident that *they* believed the Scriptures to accurately represent what happened in the past.

Now saying the Bible is true is not the same as saying it’s precise. There are differences between the levels of precision practiced by ancient writers and what’s expected today. For example, if something appears in quotes today, we expect it to be the exact wording spoken by some individual. In ancient times, no one expected that level of exactness, it was sufficient to accurately express the intent of the speaker being quoted without repeating word for word what was said. Preciseness in reporting numbers was also different then than it is now. And expressions, such as the sun rises and falls, which are not scientifically accurate, were merely the true report of what a person sees and not a scientific attempt to describe the movement of the sun. But not being precise isn’t the same as not being truthful. In God’s Word there’s no attempt to mislead or misrepresent the facts. In whatever it says, it presents the truth.

What I’ve attempted to sketch for you today in just the briefest way is that the Bible doesn’t merely claim to be the words of men *about* God but it claims to be the very words of God *to us*. God revealed His message to the biblical writers – sometimes audibly, sometimes in dreams and visions, sometimes apparently by impressions made

on their minds – and He saw to it that they accurately and without error expressed that message to us.

Above all else, this means that we can *trust* what we read in the Bible and rely on it to guide us in every area of our lives and especially in what it tells us about salvation. When we read that Jesus is our Savior, that we can receive His forgiveness by placing our faith in Him, that we can have eternal life with Him, and that there is no other way to be saved except through Him – we can believe it. And our response to this gospel invitation, and to every command in Scripture, ought to be the same as God's people long ago. In Exodus 24:7 it says "...They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey."