

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001
www.fcfonline.org

WHY YOU CAN TRUST THE BIBLE

2 Timothy 3:16 (& other texts)

By

Steven J. Cole

December 6, 1992

© Steven J. Cole, 1992

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture
Quotations are from the New American
Standard Bible, © The Lockman Foundation

December 6, 1992
The Basics About the Bible (2)

Why You Can Trust The Bible
2 Timothy 3:16 (& other texts)

Dr. James Boice ("Does Inerrancy Matter?" [ICBI], p. 9) tells of a minister's gathering where an evangelical argued a point on the basis of the Bible's teaching, mentioning the Lord's return. When he had finished, a professor in one of the leading Protestant seminaries stood up and said, "You cannot appeal to the teaching of Jesus Christ, because we do not know what Jesus really taught. The Gospels are contradictory at this point. Each of them has been written to correct the others. So far as Christ's return is concerned, we have simply got to get it into our heads that Jesus is never coming back and that all things are going to continue on as they have from the beginning." In another such gathering, after an evangelical had argued a point a minister came up to him and said, "Why are you always talking about the Bible when you try to make your case? Don't you know that nobody believes the Bible anymore?"

Boice goes on to cite a survey of clergy in five major U.S. denominations which asked the broad question, "Do you believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God?" This was weaker than asking, "Do you believe in an inerrant Bible?" or, "Do you believe in verbal inspiration?" Yet in spite of the level at which the question was asked, 82% of the Methodists, 89% of the Episcopalians, 81% of the United Presbyterians, 57% of the Baptists, and 57% of the Lutherans, answered "no."

There have always been liberal critics of the Bible, of course. But in recent years, there have been attacks against the truthfulness of the Bible from those who claim to be theological conservatives. These critics emphasize the need for personal salvation. They affirm the deity of Christ and His bodily resurrection from the dead. In most cases they even believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, the only authoritative guide for faith and practice. And yet they believe that the Bible contains errors in areas such as history, geography, chronology, and science.

A few have even gone so far as to say that the Bible errs on some doctrinal and moral issues. For example, some say that Paul's teaching on the role of women or his condemnation of homosexuality reflects his narrow, Judaic background and thus must be re-interpreted in light of our 20th century culture.

These new views from within the evangelical camp were exposed by Dr. Harold Lindell in his 1976 book, *The Battle for the Bible* [Zondervan], where he documented the drift in some of the major denominations and at Fuller Theological Seminary, where he taught for 17 years. He was accused of raising a needless controversy. His critics maintain that inerrancy is not all that important, that the real issue is a person's relationship to Jesus Christ. They argue that to hold to inerrancy is not scholastic and it is to impose on the authors of Scripture standards of accuracy that they themselves did not hold. Thus evangelicals should not divide over this issue.

But is the inerrancy of the Bible a trivial issue? I think not. If the Bible has erred on some historical facts, then how do we know that it is accurate on other historical events such as Christ's virgin birth, bodily resurrection and ascension? If we cannot be sure of the historical accuracy of the Bible, how can we know anything about Jesus? The Jesus of the Bible could then be a composite fictional character invented by the early church!

The bottom line is that if we say that there are errors in the Bible, then we proudly sit in judgment on the Bible based on our human knowledge, which is anything but infallible. The most ridiculous example of this recently was a group of supposed biblical scholars called "the Jesus seminar" who met and voted on which parts of the gospels reflect "the true sayings" of Jesus. They plan to publish a Bible edition with what Jesus really said in red letters. But nine of the "scholars" said they wouldn't put anything in the Bible in red ink! If we sit in judgment on the Bible, then we're the lords of our lives, free to pick and choose what we wish to obey. I agree with Francis Schaeffer who wrote, "Holding to a strong view of Scripture or not holding to is the watershed of the evangelical world" (*No Final Conflict* [IVP], p. 48).

But must we then close our eyes and take a leap of faith on the matter of biblical inerrancy? Must we blindly refuse to ac-

knowledge or wrestle with problems in the Bible? Must we put our heads in the sand to affirm the Bible to be without error in all that it teaches? Or are there good reasons to trust the Bible? I believe that there are. Today I want to explore the proposition that...

You can trust the Bible because it is God's Word
and it is without error in all its teaching.

1. The Bible is God's Word.

"All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). As we saw in our last study, the word means breathed out by God, which is to say,

A. God is the originator of the Bible.

The Bible did not come from the best religious ideas of the apostles or prophets. It originated when God spoke to them and through them, resulting in the written words of Scripture. This is not to say that God dictated the words of the Bible. Obviously He used the personalities and styles of the various human authors. But God originated it and thus the final product is preserved from error.

The only verse which gives us a hint of how God accomplished the process of inspiration is 2 Peter 1:21: "No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy spirit spoke from God." The word "moved" is used in Acts (27:15, 17) to describe the effect of strong winds upon Paul's ship. Luke says that the ship was "driven along" by the wind, meaning that it was no longer under the control of the sailors, but of the wind. But just as the sailors were active, though not in control, so the human authors of Scripture were active, but not in control (see Charles Ryrie, *What You Should Know About Inerrancy* [Moody Press], p. 46. The Holy Spirit moved the authors so that the words they wrote were the words God intended. Since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (John 16:13), He did not superintend errors. The Bible is the Word of God.

At this point a critic might accuse me of begging the question. I'm saying that the Bible is the inspired Word of God because the Bible says so. But anybody can make a claim like that and it doesn't prove a thing. So how do we verify whether or not the Bible's claim is true?

B. The Bible must be approached properly.

Assume for a moment that the Bible is God's Word as it claims. It would make sense, then, that we must approach it as God tells us to. The Bible tells us that we won't be able to make any sense out of its message if we approach it with a fault-finding, rebellious, unbelieving heart (1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:8). Jesus said (John 7:17), "If any man is willing to do [God's] will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself." In other words, the issue is being willing to do God's will. If we come to the Bible to find fault with it and thus provide ourselves with excuses to continue in rebellion against God, we will find supposed errors. But if we come in submission to God, with the desire to follow His ways, we will see solutions to most of the supposed problems.

Let me illustrate. Theologian Kenneth Kantzer had a friend whose mother was killed. He first heard about her death through a trusted mutual friend who reported that the woman had been standing on the street corner waiting for a bus, had been hit by another bus, was fatally injured and died a few minutes later. A short time later he heard from the dead woman's grandson that she was riding in a car which was in a collision, she was thrown from the car and killed instantly. The boy was quite certain of his facts. Which story was correct?

If you didn't like or trust the grandson, you would conclude that the boy was confused and that the first account was the correct one. Or, if you had a problem with the first man, you could believe the boy's account. Or, you could scoff at both accounts and say that obviously they contradict one another, so neither story is true. Your conclusion would be greatly affected by your approach to the credibility of the witnesses.

What Dr. Kantzer later learned from the dead woman's daughter was that her mother had been waiting for a bus, was hit by another bus and critically injured. A passing motorist put her in his car and sped off to the hospital. En route, he was in a collision in which the injured woman was thrown from the car and killed instantly. Both accounts were literally true! (Told both in "ICBI Update," Summer, 1980, and in *Christianity Today* [10/7/88], p. 23.)

Let's apply that story to the problem of harmonizing some of the seeming contradictions in the gospel accounts, such as Peter's denials or the resurrection narratives. If you approach the problems as a skeptic, you can scoff and quickly conclude, "There are errors in the biblical text." I believe that's an unscholarly and arrogant approach for several reasons. First, the different accounts make it obvious that the various authors were not fabricating a story in collusion with one another, or they would have ironed out these apparent differences. Second, we have no reason to doubt the integrity of these eyewitness accounts. Third, since they were there and I wasn't and since they are truthful men of integrity (as the totality of their writings shows), I would need strong, compelling evidence to say that they are in error, even if I cannot harmonize the accounts.

The proper approach doesn't make all the difficulties in the Bible evaporate. There are some tough problems to resolve, but not nearly as many as critics allege. Dr. Ryrie estimates that if you put together a composite list of the supposed errors, there would be about two dozen, more or less (What You Need to Know, p. 83). But the crucial issue is how you approach those problems. You don't come to the holy God of the universe as a scoffer or skeptic and expect for Him to meet you on your terms. You must come acknowledging your need of God and your sin, asking Him for understanding of spiritual truth. If you come to Him with a submissive, obedient spirit of faith in Jesus Christ, He will reveal to you the truth of His Word. From that posture, you will grow to discover that...

2. The Bible is without error in all its teaching.

This is the heart of the issue concerning the reliability of the Bible. If there are errors in the Bible, then how can we trust it? So how can we be sure that the Bible is without error, especially in view of those who claim to be evangelicals but who also claim that there are errors? There are two ways to reason:

A. Deductive evidence: The God of truth would not inspire error.

A deductive argument consists of a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion which stems from the two premises. The

whole way of stating it is called a syllogism. Any deductive argument is only as good as its premises. If a premise is faulty, then the conclusion is invalid. This argument would not prove anything to a skeptic, but it ought to carry some weight with those who agree that the Bible is inspired by God. It goes like this: Major premise: God is a God of truth (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18; Ps. 119:160). Minor premise: God breathed out (originated) all the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). Conclusion: The Scriptures are God's truth (John 17:17). (This syllogism adapted from Ryrie, p. 40.) A true God cannot originate error.

A second line of deductive reasoning goes as follows: Major premise: Jesus Christ believed and taught that the Bible is trustworthy and without error. Minor premise: I believe in and follow Jesus Christ. Conclusion: I must believe that the Bible is trustworthy and without error. To me, this is one of the strongest arguments for the total reliability of the Bible. Everything that Jesus Christ said with reference to the Scriptures shows that He had implicit trust in the totality of Scripture as the authoritative and reliable Word of God.

(1) *Jesus believed the Scriptures to be authoritative.* Often Jesus referred to the Scriptures as the authority for His actions. He assumed that if Scripture said it, that settled it. In His temptation by Satan, Jesus responded each time with, "It is written" and then quoted Scripture. He refuted the Jewish leaders by referring to Scripture (Matt. 19:3-5; Mark 7:5-13; 12:26). He taught from all the Scriptures as bearing witness to Himself (Luke 24:25, 27, 44-46; John 5:39).

(2) *Jesus believed the Scriptures to be the Word of God, not the word of men.* He referred to Moses' writings as both the commandment and Word of God (Mark 7:8, 9, 13). He refers to David's Psalm 110 as being spoken "by the Holy Spirit" (Mark 12:36).

(3) *Jesus believed in the factual historicity of the Scriptures.* He acknowledged the creation of Adam and Eve by God and referred to them as individuals, not as mere symbols of the human race (Matt. 19:3-5). He referred to Noah and the great flood as historical precedent for what will happen when He returns (Matt. 24:37-39). He verified the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot's wife (Luke 17:28-29, 32). He accepted the story of Jonah and the

great fish as actual history (Matt. 12:40). There are many other historical references that Jesus made to Old Testament characters, but these represent some of the parts of the Bible which critics scoff at as fictional. But the evidence is that Jesus saw them as true history.

(4) *Jesus believed the very words and even letters of Scripture to be authoritative, reliable, and significant.* In Jesus' debate with the Sadducees about the resurrection (Matt. 22:23-32), His argument hinges on a particular passage of Scripture (Exod. 3:6), and further on a particular word in that passage (the verb, "is"), and, even further on the tense of that verb, that it is present, not past tense!

In Matthew 5:17-18, Jesus upholds all the Law (a reference to at least the five books of Moses, if not the entire Old Testament) and says that it will all be fulfilled, down to the smallest letter or stroke ("jot or tittle," KJV). The smallest letter is *yod*, which looks like an English apostrophe. The stroke ("tittle") is a reference to a small extension which distinguishes the Hebrew *daleth* from *resh*. His point is that even the most minute details of God's Word are reliable and accurate.

(5) *Jesus taught that His own words (which are recorded in the Gospels) were the word of God and thus authoritative and trustworthy (John 12:47-50; Matt. 24:35).* Obviously, Jesus affirmed all of the Old Testament and His own words as being the word of God, totally reliable and accurate not only in spiritual matters, but in factual and historical matters as well. If we claim to be followers of Christ, we must follow Him in affirming the complete infallibility of Scripture.

B. Inductive evidence: The Bible has been authenticated as accurate prophetically, historically, and scientifically.

Whole books have been written on each of these points, so obviously I can only skim the surface. Consider,

(1) *Prophetic accuracy*—There are literally hundreds of prophecies in the Bible which were made in some cases hundreds of years before they were fulfilled with specific detail too great to be mere coincidence. Many of the prophecies in the Book of Daniel, such as the eleventh chapter, which reads like a history of events that happened from Daniel's time up to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabean revolt, about 300 years later. He also

predicted the succession of four great world powers: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome (Daniel 2 & 7). The stunning precision of these prophecies has led liberal critics, who have an a priori bias against the miraculous, to say that Daniel had to be written after the fact, although there are solid, scholarly reasons for believing that the book was written in the sixth century B.C. as claimed.

Ezekiel 26 predicted that the city of Tyre would be destroyed and the ruins scraped off and dumped into the sea. Nebuchadnezzar fulfilled the first part of the prophecy when he destroyed the city in 573 B.C. But over 200 years went by and the city was not dumped into the sea. Then Alexander the Great came along in 322 B.C. and used the ruins of the city to build a causeway out to an offshore island where the people had fled, thus fulfilling Ezekiel's prediction that the stones and timbers of Tyre would be laid in the sea.

But the most detailed and remarkable prophecies are those relating to Christ. As He said, the Scriptures bear witness of Him (John 5:39). It has been calculated that there are over 300 specific Old Testament prophecies relating to the person of Christ. Micah 5:2 predicted Bethlehem as His birthplace. Malachi 3:1 predicted that God would send His messenger to prepare the way before Him, which was fulfilled in John the Baptist (Matt. 11:10). Zechariah 9:9 prophesied that Jerusalem's king would come to her lowly, riding on the colt of a donkey, which Jesus fulfilled in the triumphal entry (Matt. 21:5). Psalm 22 describes the death of Messiah by crucifixion hundreds of years before that was known as a means of execution. Isaiah 53 predicts that Jesus would bear our sins as the lamb of God, silent before His accusers, and that His grave would be with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death. That was specifically fulfilled when Jesus was crucified with the two criminals, yet buried in the tomb of the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea.

Math professor Peter Stoner (*Science Speaks* [Moody Press], pp. 101-107) took just eight of the prophecies which Christ fulfilled and calculated conservatively that the odds of these prophecies being fulfilled in one man just by chance would be one in 10 to the 17th power! He illustrates this number by saying that if you took

that many silver dollars, they would cover the state of Texas two feet deep. Mark one, stir it thoroughly into the whole mass, blindfold a man and let him travel as far and long over the state as he wishes. He must pick that one silver dollar. Those are the odds that Jesus could, by chance, have fulfilled just eight of the prophecies made about Him. As I said, there are over 300!

(2) *Historical accuracy*—In spite of numerous critical scholars who have attempted to disprove the historical accuracy of the Bible, none have succeeded. One familiar example concerns the Hittite people, mentioned often in the Old Testament. Skeptics in the 19th century scoffed at the Bible's mentioning this race, since there was no corroborating evidence that such a people existed in history. Then, in 1906, the Hittite capital was uncovered about 90 miles east of Ankara, Turkey, silencing the critics on that point.

Critics attacked Daniel's mention of Belshazzar as the final king of Babylon, since Herodotus (450 B.C.) refers to Nabonidus as the final king. But more recent archaeological discoveries of some tablets dated from the 12th year of Nabonidus show that his son, Belshazzar, reigned in Babylon as a co-regent while Nabonidus was away for ten years fighting in Arabia. Thus when Belshazzar promises Daniel that he will make him a third ruler in the kingdom (Dan. 5:16, 29), the book of Daniel is proven to be precisely correct.

(3) *Scientific accuracy*—Although the Bible is not a science textbook and should not be pushed beyond its intended purpose, there are no proven scientific inaccuracies in the Bible. Obviously, the Bible at times uses poetic language and figures of speech which are not meant to be taken literally (such as the sun setting or rising). Moses did not write Genesis 1 to be a scientific account of origins. This is not to say that it is inaccurate, but rather that Moses' point was not to answer all our scientific questions, but rather to focus our attention on God as the mighty Creator who brought the universe into existence through the word of His power. We need to be careful not to capitulate to science as if it were inerrant (since it often has been proved wrong), nor to hold to our interpretation of debatable texts as if we were inerrant. The Bible, rightly interpreted, is inerrant. We can rest in the fact that there are no proven

scientific inaccuracies in the Bible, even though it was written thousands of years before modern science.

Conclusion

John Warwick Montgomery wrote (*Christianity Today* [7/29/77], pp. 41-42),

... the total trust that Jesus and the apostles displayed toward Scripture entails a precise and controlled hermeneutic. They subordinated the opinions and traditions of their day to Scripture; so must we. They did not regard Scripture as erroneous or self-contradictory; neither can we. They took its miracles and prophecies as literal fact; so must we. They regarded Scripture not as the product of editors and redactors but as stemming from Moses, David, and other immediately inspired writers; we must follow their lead. They believed that the events recorded in the bible happened as real history; we can do no less.

I want you to know that there are solid reasons why you can trust the Bible. If you have never investigated its claims carefully, you owe it to yourself to read the gospel accounts about the main character of the Bible, the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, you must read with a willingness to follow Him if His claims to being the Lord are authenticated. You will find that Jesus is who He claimed to be, God in human flesh, who gave Himself as the penalty for our sins.

If you are a Christian struggling with doubts, you can trust the Bible over and above all modern claims to truth. It speaks accurately and authoritatively to the problems we all grapple with. None who have trusted in God and followed the commands and counsel given in the Bible have been ultimately disappointed. The Bible is a life-changing book. I invite you to commit yourself afresh to read it, study it, and apply its teachings to your life. You can count your life on it!

Discussion Questions

1. Why is the complete accuracy of the Bible important? So what if there are historical errors?
2. How would you answer a non-Christian who said, "I don't believe in the Bible; besides, it's full of contradictions"?
3. Discuss: It is intellectually dishonest to believe in inerrancy when there are still unsolved problems in the Bible?
4. What difficulty in the Bible causes you the most trouble?

Copyright 1992, Steven J. Cole, All Rights Reserved.