WHY YOU CAN TRUST THE BIBLE

2 Timothy 3:16 (& other texts)

By

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2 Timothy Lesson 18

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You don't have to pick up books like Dan Brown's bestseller, The Da Vinci Code, to find attacks against the reliability of the Bible. The late Dr. James Boice ("Does Inerrancy Matter?" [ICBI, 1979], p. 9) cited a survey of clergy in five major U.S. denominations that asked the broad question, "Do you believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God?" This was weaker than asking, "Do you believe that the Bible is without error?" It left open the definition of "inspired." Yet in spite of the level at which the question was asked, 82 percent of the Methodists, 89 percent of the Episcopalians, 81 percent of the United Presbyterians, 57 percent of the Lutherans, and 57 percent of the Baptists, answered "no."

In our day, to say that you believe that the Bible is inspired by God and without error in all that it affirms puts you in league with the folks in the Flat Earth Society. Especially in a university town, we expose ourselves to ridicule to go on record as saying that we believe that the Bible is completely true and without error.

Even many who claim to be evangelicals will not affirm the Bible to be without error. Many professors in evangelical colleges do not accept the biblical account of creation as true. Some believe that there are historical errors in the Bible and contradictions between parallel accounts. A few have gone so far as to say that the Bible errs on doctrinal and moral issues, such as Paul's teaching on the role of women or his condemnation of homosexuality. They advocate re-interpreting these issues in light of modern knowledge.

These critics maintain that inerrancy is not all that important. The real issue is a person's relationship to Jesus Christ. They argue that to hold to inerrancy is not scholastic and it imposes 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 errs 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 can’t 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 main problem is that if we say that there are errors in the Bible, then we set ourselves up as judges over the Bible. Then we don’t have to submit to its authority. We’re free to pick and choose what we wish to obey. Over 100 years ago, the British preacher, Charles Spurgeon saw this clearly. He pointed out that faith that accepts one word of God and rejects another is not faith in God at all, but rather, faith in one’s own judgment and preferences. Further, he argued that invariably when a man argues against the Word of God, some form of sin lies at the root of it (Iain Murray, Spurgeon & Hyper-Calvinism [Banner of Truth, pp. 6-8).

But must we then take a blind leap of faith with regard to biblical inerrancy? Must we refuse to recognize or wrestle with problems in the Bible? Or are there good reasons to trust the Bible? I believe that there are. 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 last week, 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 they wrote down the 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. We must approach the Bible properly.

The Bible says that God scoffs at scoffers (Prov. 3:34). If you do not humble yourself before God and ask Him to open your spiritually blind eyes, you won’t be able to understand His truth (1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Thess. 2:11-12). 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 submit to God. If you come to the Bible to find fault with it and to provide yourself with excuses to continue in rebellion against God, you will find supposed errors. But if you come in submission to God, with the desire to follow His ways, you will find solutions to most of the difficulties.

The late theologian Kenneth Kantzer had a friend whose mother was killed. Kantzer first heard about her death through a trusted mutual friend who reported that the woman had been standing on the street corner, was hit by a 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 that 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 approach to the credibility of the witnesses would greatly affect your conclusion.

Dr. Kantzer later learned from the dead woman’s daughter 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! (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 may quickly conclude, “There are errors in the Bible.” I think 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 disappear. 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 (ibid., 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 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. You will grow to discover that...

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

This is the heart of the issue. 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? There are two ways to reason:
A. Deductive evidence: The God of truth would not inspire error.

A deductive argument (or syllogism) consists of a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion that stems from the two premises. 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. Consider:

(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 said that all the Scriptures bore witness to Him (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 referred 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 that God created Adam and Eve and referred to them as real people, not myths (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 of Lot’s wife (Luke 17:28-29, 32). He accepted the story of Jonah and the great fish as actual history (Matt. 12:40). Jesus made many other references to Old Testament people and events. Clearly, He saw them as true history, not as fiction.

(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 hinged on a particular verse of Scripture (Exod. 3:6), and further on a particular verb tense (present) in that verse!

In Matthew 5:17-18, Jesus upheld the Law and Prophets (a reference to the entire Old Testament) and said 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 that 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 were the authoritative, trustworthy word of God.

He said (John 12:49-50), “For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.” (See also, 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 truthfulness 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 I can only skim the surface. Consider,

(1) Prophetic accuracy—

There are hundreds of prophecies in the Bible that were made in some cases hundreds of years before they were fulfilled, with too much specific detail to be mere coincidence. For example, Daniel 11 reads like a history of the 300 years that followed Daniel’s lifetime. 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 (see, Josh McDowell, Daniel in the Critics’ Den [Campus Crusade for Christ, 1979]).

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 for 250 years 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 amazing prophecies are those relating to Christ. As He said, the Scriptures bear witness of Him (John 5:39). Scholars say that there are over 300 specific Old Testament prophecies relating to the person of Christ. Micah 5:2 predicted Bethlehem as His birthplace. 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. It says that His grave would be with wicked men, yet He would be 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 that 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. And 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 co-regent while Nabonidus was at war in Arabia for ten years. Thus the book of Daniel is precisely correct when Belshazzar promises Daniel that he will make him a third ruler in the kingdom (Dan. 5:16, 29).

(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 sometimes uses poetic language and figures of speech that are not intended to be taken literally (such as the sun setting or rising). Moses’ purpose in Genesis 1 was not to write a detailed 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. Rather, he wants to
show God as the mighty Creator who spoke the universe into existence through His power in an orderly manner.

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.

Thus, 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 as Lord if His claims 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!
Application Questions

1. Why is the complete accuracy of the Bible important? What difference would it make if there were 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. Is it intellectually dishonest to believe in inerrancy when there are still unsolved problems in the Bible? Why/why not?

4. Since it is only the original manuscripts of the Bible that are inerrant, and we do not possess any originals, is it still important to affirm inerrancy? Why/why not?

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