

Why the Bible Is Such a Big Deal

II Timothy 3:16

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I want to start by reading a very familiar verse that I hope will be used as one of insight in this study and as a general inspiration for us. The Apostle Paul was seeking to encourage his young disciple Timothy as to a proper concept of Scripture. Timothy was a Jew and he understood the Old Testament and Paul was adding to that in terms of what would be seen as canonical Scripture one day. He gives these words from II Timothy 3:16–17 which says [16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. This is God's Word.

I would like to give you kind of a personal testimony of my own trek in understanding God's Word. Our theme this year is Thy Word is Truth taken from Jesus' Priestly Prayer in John 17:17. All of us probably have some unique insights as to how we came to Christ but also how you came to an understanding of the authority of Scripture in your life. That's very important and I hope perhaps that this will challenge you.

It's been said that you never get a second chance to make a good first impression and those are the words of Will Rogers. That has been true many times in my life. I recall one agonizing moment when I had already met this particular gentleman but I had the privilege to meet again with him to ask him for the hand of his daughter in marriage. He is my wife's father. I recall it was particularly troublesome because I had proposed to Leslie a few days before in Atlanta and she thankfully said 'yes' so the next step was meeting with her dad. I had planned to meet with him in a carefully arranged setting in a few weeks and I get a call from her and she said "My dad is coming through Chattanooga and he wants to meet with you." This was the next day and that would have been a work day for me, Monday.

The problem was I was only home for a few months before we were to be married and my job was pushing laundry carts at a hotel in Chattanooga. He was going to come and eat lunch with me at work. I was terrified because I would be in jeans, sweaty, disheveled and it wasn't at all how I pictured this conversation occurring. My loving wife just ushered him into my presence and fortunately he

said 'yes.' He must have thought when we met 'who on earth is my daughter marrying?' I had really hoped for another occasion to in a sense make another first impression. First impressions are very important.

In doing some studying for this I came across a familiar passage in Genesis 3. In this passage we read about our first impression of Satan in Scripture. It is the first four words that Satan says. When we see Satan first appear, he gives us his strategy. The first impression we get of Satan is his strategy that he is going to use to attack God, the Gospel and to undermine the faith of believers, like you and me. It has been his modus operandi since the very beginning and those four words are what he said to Eve when he said "Did God actually say..." So the first four words we have from Satan in the Bible reveals his strategy and that is indeed the way he has dealt with human beings ever since. He constantly challenges us as to the truthfulness of God's Word. If he hasn't challenged you, he will, I promise you.

His priority is to undermine and discredit God's Word. It's very calculated and very precise. He loves to bad mouth God, misrepresent His purposes, give platforms to skeptics, to make sin enjoyable, to insist that our self-rights are the most important thing, to dismiss the idea of sin, to mock the Gospel and to seduce us into thinking he can give us more rapidly and efficiently what God has promised and he does it in many different ways. The bottom line is he wants us not to trust God at His Word and he reveals that from the very beginning. Whole Christian denominations that at one time revered and upheld God's Word have abandoned it because they have been seduced by thinking the Bible is filled with contradictions and errors or that in some way God is not faithful about His promises or purposes. It is sad that the Bible has been lost. Many Christians have had their faith undermined and crippled because they have been persuaded not to trust the Scriptures.

In this study I'd like to share my testimony and my reflections along these lines because I grew up in a wonderful Christian home but I didn't grow up in a denomination where the Bible is held in the lofty way that it is at Briarwood. I came to be a Christian at an early age but then going through high school I began to question my faith and in my surroundings there weren't a lot of answers. When the Bible was referred to it was often done in a condescending way or in a way that tended to try and explain away miracles or paint a different picture of His purposes.

When I went off to college I came across a book titled History in Christianity by Clark Pinnock. It was an absolutely delightful book and I had never read anything that defended the inerrancy and authority of Scripture. I remember it blending with my heart and saying "Wow there are people out here that believe what has been tugging in my heart for months and months and months." I came to a real crossroads. I can tell you of the occasion when God convicted me of the

truthfulness of Scripture but we learn quickly as Christians that trust in the Scriptures are going to be challenged and challenged.

I read a remarkable challenge to Scripture just recently put out by Newsweek Magazine that in this case was a phenomenal hit piece on the trustworthiness of Scripture. It was a long article that was their cover article. It was titled "The Bible is so misunderstood it's a sin." The author of the article goes to great pains to demolish a view in the confidence of Scripture. He attacks it in a variety of ways but it's a real journalism hit piece. It will excite and enthuse those who have learned to distrust the Bible or believe that it's just a human document.

Al Moler, a Southern Baptist Seminary President, who has spoken in our pulpit, writes this about this article in Newsweek; "It is an irresponsible screed of post Christian invective, leveled against the Bible and even more to the point against evangelical Christianity. It is one of the most irresponsible articles ever to appear in journalistic guides." He is right. I don't know what Newsweek was thinking. In his review, Moler points out that many times some of the more liberal magazines like Time and Newsweek, will have articles discussing Christianity and Moler says "Often I don't agree with their conclusions but I appreciate their debate and discussion back and forth and yet there is none of that in this particular article on the Bible. It is an article that lacks journalistic balance and integrity."

The author of this Newsweek article only sites a few sources that are from commentators that are very hostile to evangelical Christianity. He grossly exaggerates the time between the writing of the New Testament and when the canon was finally collected. He twists the view of the council of Nicaea. He seems completely unaware of the different views of the law, the moral, the civil and the ceremonial law. He puts forth many arguments that a first year seminary student would find easy to debunk but it is a tough piece to read because it is so irresponsible. This is such a typical attack because it's dishonest, underhanded and done in a way that is hard to refute because sometimes the truth is kind of twisted. So unless you have had some training in defending the truth it would be hard to understand where this gentleman is coming from.

The article reminds us that God's Word is under attack and you and I need to appreciate why we believe and what we believe about the Bible. I want to reflect on some of the key questions that I asked as I was seeking about God's Word and how it applies in my life and where it came from. One of my first questions was, why do we need Revelation anyway? Many don't think that is a necessity. I have a good friend who believes in reincarnation. His whole belief system is founded on the fact that he sort of has an occasional déjà vu moment. So he thinks the reason he feels that is probably because he has lived in a former life. He knows there are other religions that believe in reincarnation so he has decided that's true on the most scanty evidence. He is staking his life on a feeling about déjà vu and I really feel sad for my friend.

We need Revelation for two reasons. It is because God is big and we are not. We need Revelation because of the greatness and incomprehensibility of God. Isaiah 55:9 says [9] For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. When we come to Scripture we see a picture of God who's breathtakingly transcendent. He is way above us. He is big and we are not. Paul writes in Romans 11:33–34, [33] Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! [34] "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" When we wrestle with the things that we don't know about God or He doesn't show us, we have to ask ourselves 'do we really want a God that we understand?' I'm a humanities guy but if you had seen my math scores in high school and college you would not want to have believed in a God that I could explain. My brain is way too small to grasp Him and the only way I can know Him is if He chooses to reveal Himself to me.

It's worse though. It's not only that God is big but because we are small. The fall of man means that we're not, when it comes to Scripture, just uneducated, but we're completely out of our league. That is very important because a writer like the author of that Newsweek magazine has no concept of the depravity of man and what that does to our understanding of God's ways. Paul writes in Ephesians 2 that you were dead in your trespasses and sins. So we're not only uneducated but we are dead in our trespasses and sins. We need the grace of God so that we can even open our eyes to respond in faith. We certainly need the grace of God and the Spirit working in our heart that we might understand the Scripture of God. I Corinthians 2:14 says [14] The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. Our problem isn't a lack of willingness but it's an inability.

You see this affirmed again and again in Scripture. There is a story in Matthew 12 where the Pharisees were confronting Jesus about His behavior on the Sabbath. He not only forgave a man but healed a man with a withered hand. Toward the end of that passage it says in Matthew 12:14, [14] But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him. Think about that. They have just watched a withered hand get restored and all they can see is an enemy. Think of the breathtaking blindness and that's all of us apart from the Spirit of God. Those Pharisees are me except for the grace of God. Scripture demands that we need Him to reveal Himself to us because of His greatness and our fallenness.

Another question I asked is how does God reveal Himself to us? God reveals Himself through several ways. First He does it through natural revelation. He revealed Himself in creation. Psalm 19:1–2 says [1] The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. [2] Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. Paul picked up that same

theme in Romans 1:19–20 which says [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. Paul is basically telling us that God is screaming at you and me in His creation.

That is why so many wonderful Christian organizations have figured out if they want young people to come to Christ they are going to take them out on a hillside at some attractive camp and share the Gospel with them as they are stargazing into the stars at night and they'll hear God speak. We understand the Spirit is at work of course here but why does that work? It works because of His revelation to us, His natural revelation in creation. It is sometimes good to get young people out of their routine of electronics and put them in a place perhaps where they have never been and be able to stare at the stars in the sky and listen to the thunder roll across and sense the power of God.

This should give us great encouragement in evangelism. If you didn't like the Gospel you could really get ticked off because when you look out into creation where God is screaming and you look inside to your conscience He is calling out even more. Romans 2:14–16 says [14] For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. [15] They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them [16] on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. What a sneaky thing God has done to our non-Christian friends that He paints in creation, the testimony of His presence and then writes in their heart as He says 'as He shows the work of the law written on their hearts.' We have such an advantage in sharing the Gospel with others because of that natural revelation.

God also works through supernatural revelation. Back in Daniel's day we see how God worked through dreams and visions. We see it in Joseph's life as he was taken into Egypt. We see it in Joseph, Mary's husband, as God revealed Himself through dreams with him. We see dreams being used in a way of direct supernatural revelation. There is what is known as a theophany – the burning bush showing the presence of God in an animate object, we see God appearing in the cloud as the people of Israel were leaving Egypt, we see God appearing in the form of certain angels as a supernatural revelation. We have God's direct voice. God called out to Samuel as a little boy and he didn't understand what was going on. We see God work through miracles and signs to Pharaoh in Egypt. We see Him speak through various Prophets and Apostles. He supernaturally revealed Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ and also in Scripture. God has directly intervened in the past.

It's tempting for us to wonder why He doesn't do it more often. All we get is this book. Wouldn't it be better, Lord and more persuasive if You would just come out of nowhere and reveal Yourself? We think that is true and God is certainly able to do that but it's interesting that it leads to another question. If He trusted in His written Word, why was it best to be given to us in a written format? It indeed is best because it gives us direct contact with the original message. That's very important that we understand what the original was like and something that wasn't being manipulated. The Newsweek article I referred to earlier takes time blasting what we would say was a very erroneous view of the transmission of Scripture down through the centuries.

Also by giving us written revelation, it groups revelation together and preserves it. We typically find that when people rely on supernatural visions and words from God they can err and wander and that's where many cults begin. By giving us a written word it groups our revelation together and preserves.

It also works independent of preachers or prophets. It gives us a standard whereby we can critique our pastor by every week as to whether he is speaking according to God's Word or contrary to God's Word. So we are not held captive to demigods or strong personalities that might preach that certain things are true but we know they are not because they are contrary to Scripture.

Written revelation also remains with us and makes us responsible. Even though I might not read it every day as I should, I still have it with me. If I was fortunate enough to have a parent to encourage me to memorize it as a child or I have taken some of that word in my heart, it's funny how it crops up at the most inconvenient times. When I am distracted or going in a different direction and God wants to turn me around, that word which has been written on my heart through memory, study and the testimony of other, can come back and yank me back to where I need to be. What an act of God's grace that is and a blessing. Therefore God gives us plenty to follow and obey.

Mark Twain made this famous statement; it's not what I don't understand in the Bible that troubles me, it's what so clear I can't misunderstand. Isn't that true of all of us? God gives us a written revelation which in many ways is vastly superior to the supernatural revelation and those were legitimate in Scripture. Thanks to God who has given us this written revelation.

Another question is what do we mean when we say the Bible is the Word of God? Not everybody means the same thing when they say the Word of God. Lots of people use this phrase but mean different things by it. Lots of religious books claim to be from God but they are anything but the Word of God. There have been various views in the century. In the early part of the last century we saw the classical liberal view become more and more prominent.

Two words summarize that liberal view and one is illumination and one is intuition. The view of illumination says the Bible is a collection of pious insights of religious men. Another perspective was intuition where men would discover truths as they looked back in history, although history was somewhat flawed as some of these folks thought. Here men would draw conclusions and learn some lessons but they are hardly something that is completely trustworthy.

In the early part of the century there was a theologian named Carl Bark who deeply regretted the classical liberal view and sought to push away from that. He came up with the perspective that God's Word is something that we encounter when we read the Bible. So God's inspiration turns it into His Word as we read it and apply it to ourselves. So in and of itself the Bible is not God's Word but as we intersect with it, it in a sense becomes God's Word. Tom Cheely many times stood at this pulpit and would say 'the Bible does not become God's Word' to get away from Carl Bark's view of getting away from the classical liberalism but in many ways this view opened a Pandora's box of confusion of what the Bible really is.

Most Christians have held to what we might call the evangelical view of God's Word and it's not that it becomes God's Word but that it affirms four statements. I will close by looking at these four statements. The evangelical view affirms that one, the Biblical documents, the Bible, is inspired. We have to look at the word inspired. Some view this differently because of how someone might get inspired. Inspiration from a Biblical perspective is far different and we see it in II Timothy 3:16. Paul uses the word 'God breathed' and this is translated elsewhere as inspiration. This was God literally working through men to breathe through them His Word so that they would write in a way that would preserve the integrity of their own styles but He would breathe through them precisely the words that He wanted.

II Peter 1:21 says [21] For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. That's a very important concept. It's like a sailing ship the way God works with these Apostles and Prophets as they put pen to paper or to parchment. He breathed through them and they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. So the resulting definition would be inspiration is that mysterious process by which God, the Prime Mover, worked through the human prophets without destroying their individual personalities and styles to produce Divinely, authoritative writings. Inspiration fundamentally is mysterious and something that is believed in by faith but it is something that is taught very clearly in Scripture. Believers learn very quickly of the inspiration of Scripture.

Secondly, Biblical documents are also authoritative. The Bible is authoritative. When they speak it is presumed that God is speaking. This is what we see repeatedly when we ask what do the Biblical writers think they are doing. For instance in Hebrews 3:7 we see this author is quoting Psalm 95:7 and in doing so

the writer to the Hebrews knew that the Psalmist was a human being but who does he claim to be quoting? Hebrews 3:7–8 says [7] Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice, [8] do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness.” The writer of Hebrews immediately attributes this, not to the Psalmist, but to the Holy Spirit. This is incredibly important because we see exactly the writer of Hebrew’s view of the Scripture where it’s not coming from a bunch of men writing the Old Testament but that it’s coming from God Himself, the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 19:4–5 is similar in that it is quoting from Genesis 2:24. We think that Matthew believed that Moses wrote Genesis 2 but in this passage who does he attribute this passage to what is the real origin of Genesis 2:24? Matthew 19:4–5 says [4] He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, [5] and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? Matthew is saying that the passage from Genesis 2:24 was written by the Creator and not Moses.

We see this in Acts 4 and Acts was written by Dr. Luke. In Acts 4 he was accounting a church’s prayer and they starting quoting Psalm 2:1–2. The prayer went like this in Acts 4:25–26, [25] who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, “‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? [26] The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’— So the early church believed very strongly that though they were quoting this passage in Psalms that it was actually the Holy Spirit that was speaking that Psalm. In the early church those believers understood where the Scripture came from and it wasn’t just a bunch of old men getting together and writing.

In I Thessalonians 2 we read of Paul’s own testimony of his writing. I Thessalonians 2:13 says [13] And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. The Apostle Paul was very clear in his mind that though he was writing letters to these churches that God was speaking through him.

That was precisely the view of his friend, Peter. Peter writes about Paul’s writings in II Peter 3:15–16 which says [15] And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, [16] as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. The words ‘other Scriptures’ is very interesting because it clearly indicates that Peter understood his friend Paul was writing stuff on the same level as the Old Testament Scriptures. When we say God’s Words are authoritative

and from Him that's precisely what the New Testament writers believed as they were pinning these various words.

The Biblical documents are also infallible and inerrant. We believe that is in the original autographs. The Newsweek article spends a lot of time criticizing the canonization process, the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture. We believe that we don't have the actual original copies of God's Word and that original autographs are no longer with us. What we do have and has been proven again and again through textual criticism is that what we hold are remarkably accurate pictures. It's the variety of translations that give us that assurance. People who have taken the ancient documents and translated them have pointed out that there have been some inconsistencies but by far most are just little typos and minor things that don't effect the main doctrinal positions.

We find that the Bible documents point to being very truthful, infallible and inerrant. One, the Bible presumes it. Jesus affirmed it again and again as He reflected on Scripture, in His case the Old Testament and submitted to it. The churches believed it throughout the centuries as we see the writings of Augustus, Luther, Calvin and others. I would say that God's character demands it because Satan's greatest strategy of undermining the Scripture isn't to take you out. It's to discredit God. His attack is on God. Because God's character is true His Word speaks of truth without error.

Fourthly, the Biblical documents were determined by God. The process of these books being collected together is called canonization. We find that the Old Testament was progressively recognized as God's Word over a period of centuries. By the time of the conquest of the land of Joshua about 450 BC the first five books of the Old Testament were considered Scripture which is referenced in Joshua 1:8. By 300 to 200 BC the Jews commonly recognized the Scriptures of what we know to be the Old Testament.

The canonization of the New Testament began in the first century as soon as they were written. The standard of apostolic authorship or approval caused some books to be selected over others, read in the church, circulated among the churches and collected together as Paul writes II Peter 3. Most of the church fathers recognized almost all the books of the New Testament as Scripture on par with the Old Testament pretty much by the end of the second century. The Newsweek article stretches this out very irresponsibly, with the Universal church coming to agreement by the end of fourth century.

We find that the best way to see that perspective is, it wasn't certain councils or certain Christians deciding what God's Word was but these councils were recognizing those books that had been elevated over the early part of the church to be recognized precisely as God's Word. They were recognizing what God was doing, not in a sense determining it for that was done by God Himself. What were they looking at over the years? There are some insufficient views. Some think the

age of the book is what was critical but it really wasn't that. Some view books were accepted and older books rejected. It wasn't necessarily a language issue because it wasn't that they had to be Hebrew or Greek or Aramaic because there were some Hebrew works that were excluded. It was in agreement with the Torah because there were other works throughout the Old Testament that were excluded though they might have agreed with the Torah. It wasn't that they had certain religious value that made them unique because a lot of religious books have been out there.

We find a better view that canonicity was determined by God and the authority of books were recognized by the men of God. The people of God rightly asked, "Are these books authoritative, do they speak the truth with great authority, do they come from the Prophets, are they prophetic and most of all are they truthful in all they teach especially as they predict the future? Are they accurate, authentic and consistent in terms of their content? Do they blend with what has come before in a good way? Lastly, are they dynamic? Do they change lives?" It's those kinds of issues that the church in the early years were focusing on that those works that God had declared would be part of His canon.

It's a remarkable process and I'm sorry we had to go so quickly through this in this study but this is something you need to take very seriously and very much to heart because as we look around us we see people who are desperately longing for truth. Our society is reeling out of control because people don't have the truth or understand the truth or know the truth. I kept thinking as I finished reading that article in Newsweek how harshly and loudly the author was criticizing the Scripture and the process of canonization and its production. I couldn't help feel a twinge of sadness because I'm convinced that someday this writer will stand before his Maker and he will understand that the Scripture was true.

I reflect on myself because I think when I die if I discover that the Gospel wasn't true and Jesus wasn't real, I have had a wonderful life believing in the Scripture and God's Word has blessed me immeasurably as I have held to and taught its tenants to my children. If the Gospel is true then I haven't lost much but bless those who believe that the Bible isn't true if they discover that it is for how much more desperate their situation will be. We need to be firm in our convictions about the authority on which we stand so that people around us who desperately need the truth might look to us as examples of those who take our confidence in God's Word. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, we thank You for being in and having the privilege to stand upon Your Word. We rejoice in this Word that has been given to us and revealed to us so that we might not only know You but live for You and die in You. Lord, I pray that You might continue to work in us and protect this church that we might be a beacon of Your Word, preaching it before a watching world in a way that is

powerful and effective. I pray You will bring to us people who know Your Word and people who need to know Your Word and may You work in us for Your glory, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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