

52 STORIES OF THE BIBLE

by

Dr. Bill Mounce

Brought to you by your friends at

47. Scripture

I. Inspiration of Scripture

There is trouble in Ephesus. Paul's prophecy in Acts 21 had come true. The leadership in the church had gone bad. The wolves were attacking the sheep and the behavior of these elders was reprehensible and their teaching was heretical. And so Paul sends Timothy to Ephesus to try to deal with the problem. Eventually he writes his first letter to Timothy to give him more instruction and then he finally writes his second letter to Timothy, again to help him with the troubles in Ephesus and then ask him to come and see him.

In the course of 2 Timothy, specifically in chapter 3, Paul is describing the godlessness that Timothy is experiencing. I want to pick it up at Chapter 3:14, Paul says to Timothy, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, [that is, that he may be] equipped for every good work. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke and exhort, with complete patience and teaching." In the midst of the turmoil in Ephesus, in the midst of all the false teaching that's going on, Paul encourages Timothy to hang on to Scripture, to make it central to his ministry.

Verse 16 is the primary biblical passage for what we call the "Doctrine of Inspiration;" what we think about Scripture.

A. "All"

All Scripture is breathed out by God. Let's look at the different pieces of that verse. All of Scripture, all of the Bible comes from the very mouth of God; each and every last little bit from cover to cover is from the mouth of God. That's our doctrine of inspiration. So when we say that we believe all of Scripture is from God, that includes the easy parts to believe. There are many easy parts of Scripture to believe that they come from God and are true; those parts that tell us that God loves us; those parts that tell us that God cares for us; those parts that tell us that his grace sustains us. These are the easy parts, usually, in Scripture that we can believe come from God.

But when we say that all of Scripture is from God, that includes the hard parts too, doesn't it? Perhaps in your situation in life, believing that God cares about you is very, very difficult to believe. And yet we believe that all of Scripture is from God.

There are many other hard parts as well; hard parts like the claims of Scripture that appear to conflict with science and history. We are asked to believe, in the face of everything that we are taught in school that you and I are an evolutionary fluke; still believe that Genesis 1 is from God and is true, that God created the heavens and the earth, and that God created Adam and Eve. The hard parts, sometimes.

Hard parts like when Scripture claims that God works in the midst of evil to accomplish his good and in the midst of the turmoil, you and I are supposed to "rejoice." These are

hard parts of Scripture to believe, are they not? And yet we believe that all of Scripture is from the mouth of God.

We believe that man is the head of the marriage and the head of the family when everything in society is trying to neuter every male and portray them as weak and stupid. I saw an ad on TV last night that was the worst offensive ad I think I've ever seen. The man couldn't even remember his children's names. The man couldn't even remember their favorite hobbies. So if they get a cell phone, they'll stay in touch and he'll remember his children's names. That's what the world says about you, men, that you're stupid and moronic. Scripture says you are strong and you are to be the head of your house and the head of your marriage.

These are the hard parts and yet we believe that all Scripture is true, don't we? The easy and the hard parts.

B. "Scripture"

All of Scripture is from the mouth of God. What does Paul mean by "Scripture"? It's not quite apparent at first. Back in verse 15 Paul is talking about "sacred writings", that Timothy has known the sacred writings since he was a child. We know that Timothy's father was Greek, but his mom and his grandmother were Jewish, and evidently Timothy was raised as a good Jewish boy. So certainly the sacred writings would include what we call the Old Testament. But notice how Paul continues: "You have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." That's the message of Jesus; that's the message of the apostolic ministry; that is the witness of what you and I today call the "New Testament," even though not all of it was written when Paul said this. So when we say that we believe that all of Scripture is from the mouth of God, it's all of the Old and all of the New that is divinely inspired.

C. "Breathed out by God"

Now if you're not familiar with the ESV, the next phrase probably struck you as kind of strange; that we believe that all of Scripture is "breathed out by God." The older translations use words like "inspired," that Scripture was given by inspiration. The problem is that the meaning of the English word "inspired" has changed and it doesn't mean what it meant in the King James' day; and it certainly doesn't mean what the Greek says. Because today we talk about a lot of things being inspiring, don't we? My nine-year old son is "inspired" by Garfield. He loves Garfield with a passion. His walls are covered with Garfield cartoons. He reads every Garfield book there is. His bookshelves are littered with Garfield books and, in fact, Hayden learned to read by reading Garfield. Hayden loves Garfield. He is inspired by him. But it's not what Paul is saying.

The Bible is inspiring, but that's not what 2 Timothy 3:16 is teaching. The fact of the matter is that Scripture is unique and how we got it is unique. There isn't a word in Greek or in English that adequately describes it, so Paul does what Paul often does, he makes up words. Paul makes up words all over the place. We can't do that quite so much in English, but in Greek you can do it all over the place. So Paul took the word for "God" and then he took the word for "breathe" and he stuck them together, and he said all Scripture is "theopneustos." All of Scripture is "God-breathed." All of Scripture is breathed out by God.

Peter says it a little differently in the second most important verse on inspiration, and that's 2 Peter 1:20-21 where Peter says, "...that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 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." This is the doctrine of the "Inspiration of Scripture;" that God is the source of Scripture; that he breathed it out; that it came from his very mouth; that it is from God. In other words, there is no difference, at all, between me standing here and reading a verse to you than Jesus appearing and saying those exact same words. There is no difference in terms of the truthfulness of the words. That is the doctrine of inspiration; that what we have here comes from the very mouth of God.

II. Two Implicit Points

Now, there are two points that are implicit in this discussion that are assumed, but I want to make sure that it is clear.

A. True

Number one: Because Scripture comes from the mouth of God, it is therefore true. He doesn't say it, but it's the assumption of the passage. God is true and therefore what he says is true.

B. Authoritative

Secondly, because Scripture comes from the mouth of God, it is also authoritative.

Because Scripture comes from the mouth of God, it carries the authority of God; and that Scripture has the authority and that Scripture demands the right to determine our theology, what we believe, and our behavior, how we act it out. That is actually one of the implications that Paul is going to deal with later on in the passage.

Because Scripture comes from the mouth of God, it is true and it is authoritative. I know in our hearts we're saying "Amen!" And we're saying, "Yes, that's what I believe." But I always find myself wondering if we really, truly, always believe it. Do we really believe that all of Scripture comes from the very mouth of the God who creates and sustains and saves all things?

When I hear a preacher preach his own ideas; when I hear a preacher take his ideas and put them at the same level as God's ideas, the only assumption that I can draw from that is that he is a blasphemer. And that he does not believe that God's Word, Scripture, is from the mouth of God; because if you truly believe that Scripture comes from the mouth of God, you're not going to put your ideas on a level par with it, are you? You're not going to mix your ideas with his. You're not going to say, "Thus saith the Lord" and what comes out is "Thus saith Bill." Certainly, there are times that we have to give opinions and we state them as such if we are honest. There are times in which we have to make an interpretation and when we make a mistake in interpretation, we ask for forgiveness, because it's serious. But I can come to no other conclusion, ultimately, when people preach their own ideas, that they are blasphemers and do not truly believe that Scripture comes from God. I don't know what else to conclude.

But it's not just pastors. When I hear people say, "Oh, yeah, I believe Scripture is from God" and then they believe something that is contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture, I have to scratch my head and say, "Do they really?" The Bible says that there should not even be a hint of sexual immorality, not a hint (Ephesians 5:3). But what so often

happens? We find that legalistic line; we want to know, "Well, how far can I go?" The idea is not to stay as far away from it as possible; but it's to come and put our toes up as close to it as possible. And I have to say, "Do we really believe that?" Do we really believe that Ephesians 5:3, for example, is from the very mouth of God, who gave me life and can take it whenever he chooses? He says let there not even be a hint, a hint of sexual immorality. Do we really believe that all of Scripture is from the very mouth of God?

C. Do You Really Believe This?

I think that this is an incredibly important question that we need to ask ourselves, "Do you believe this? Do your children, if you have them, believe this?" Really? Why?

One of the disconcerting things that happened to me when I was teaching was one graduation. I'd been teaching at the university for about six years. I'd had a student named Matt four years earlier in an Introduction to New Testament class and we talked about inspiration there. I hadn't seen Matt for the next four years and this particular graduation he was graduating. We had sat all morning in those stupid black robes with those stupid black hats in the Southern California sun, cheering students we could barely remember. I was burning hot. I hate heat. It was over and I ran back to my office and I was taking my robe and hat and putting it back in mothballs, where it belonged, and I just wanted to go home and start summer vacation; and Matt showed up at the door and he obviously wanted to talk. I obviously didn't want to talk, but I did. A flood of questions poured out of his mouth and I was trying to figure out, where is he going? Where he was going was, "Now tell me again why I believe Scripture is from God?" All I could think of was, "Matt, why didn't you ask this question four years ago when you had teachers around you and friends around you that could help you think through this teaching?"

But something had happened in graduation, knowing that he was going out into the real world and basic fundamental assumptions of his life were starting to be challenged, and he was desperate and he was scared. He did not know why he believed the Bible is true.

I wish every one of us would ask that question. This is a common experience. It is in fact a necessary and a healthy question. Why did Timothy, why do I believe that Scripture is from the very mouth of God? Because if you do not raise this question for yourself, if you do not come to your own conclusions, then you will never really believe that Scripture is true and most importantly, you will never fully trust Scripture. You cannot inherit the faith and the convictions of your parents and your Sunday School teachers or those whom the Lord used to draw you to himself.

Why do you think that Scripture is true? Well, this is the passage to go to because some of the best answers to that question are in this passage.

One of the answers is when Paul reminds Timothy that you have learned the truth of the gospel from the time you were a child and you were taught it by people that you trusted. One of the reasons that I believe Scripture is true is that I trust the people who taught me that the Bible is true; and Timothy had a great mom and a great grandma and he had a great spiritual father in Paul. These were people that he trusted and so he believed them when they said that the sacred writings are from the very mouth of God. I remember talking to my daughter, Kiersten, when she was about 10. Kiersten came and we were talking once and I said, "Kiersten, why do you believe the Bible is true?" And she looked at me and didn't blink an eye and she said, "Because you and mom

do." And I thought, what a great answer, what an incredibly deep and profound answer for a ten-year old. Because that is one of the reasons we believe, is it not? Several months ago Tyler came and we were chatting. Tyler is 15 now, and Tyler just brought up the point, he said, "You know, I became a Christian because I trusted you and mom. This is the family I was raised in and it made good sense and I trusted my folks." But he said, "I really need to go through the step of being sure that the faith is my faith, and I just don't simply believe something because you told me to." I went, "Wow! That's exactly right, Tyler. It's exactly right." What a profound statement for a 15-year old to make.

So I gave the first reason why Timothy and I believe that Scripture is true, but in somewhat of a guarded sense. We believe that it is true because we trust the people that taught us Scripture. Yet, it's a great answer for a child, not an adult. Paul gives a second reason why Timothy believes that Scripture is from the very mouth of God. It is hidden in the English phrase, "firmly believed." What Paul is telling Timothy is that "you have become fully convinced in the course of life's experiences that Scripture is true; that you have lived out the truths expressed in the Bible and experience has confirmed that what Scripture says is true." In other words, Scripture validates itself. It's being done by the power of the Holy Spirit. But it's like Jesus tells the Jews, "If you can't believe this, believe on the basis of my works." In other words, there's self-validation going on in Scripture.

It's the idea that as you go through life and as you take what you read in this marvelous Book and you put it into practice, even if it doesn't make sense to you, it comes full circle and you realize "You know what?, I kind of thought it was wrong, but it's proven itself in the experiences in my life that it's true." And that is how you and I become fully convinced that Scripture is true.

In my own personal experience, Scripture has never let me down, ever. I know that there are still some truths that are going to take some more time to work through, especially in those passages of Scripture that when you first read them, you go, "Now there's just no way." But I believe Scripture is true, so I will believe these hard sayings and I will put them into practice and the experience in my life is that those things have always come full circle and the message of Scripture has validated itself.

For example, I don't know if you have James 1:2. For a long time my Bible went from James 1:1 to James 1:3 or 1:4 because James 1:2 is a stupid verse. "Count it all joy my brethren when you meet various trials knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance, and let endurance have its complete and perfect result that you may be complete, lacking in nothing." Oh yeah, right James, like you've been around the block a couple of times? Rejoice in the midst of sorrow? Yeah. Right. Try to have two daughters die and then read that verse and believe it's true. But 17 years after Rachel has died, 18 years after Rose has died, I understand that James is true, even though it's the stupidest verse of the Bible. It self-validates itself in the experiences of life. There's no other book that does that, none at all.

In my experience, Scripture has never let me down, even though I still have much to learn. We have to take this and put it against all the other claims to truth that are out there. When you look at what the world is saying, what the world says is true and then you try to live out what the world says is true and it's different from what God says is true. It continues to fail to convince, and the message of the world that claims to be true when it counters the Word of God, is always wrong. You'd think we'd get it after a while, wouldn't you? Don't you get frustrated with yourself getting tricked from time to time?

I engaged in a cross-cultural ministry yesterday. I went to the mall. Wow! I like church. Safe. Man, is the world weird! I sat down and a poster caught my eye and I simply couldn't turn my head fast enough because it was an ad and it was pure pornography. It was pure pornography. And it's embedded in my memory now. Last time that I go to the mall.

In your experience of looking at pornography, have you ever been fully, deeply satisfied? The answer is "no." That's why the Bible says, "Don't even let there be a hint of sexual immorality." And in the experiences of life, pornography is a lie. And the Bible is true, that's why I believe it. It validates itself in the experiences of life.

There are many other reasons and I'm going to put in a number three, and this is personal. This is opinion, and this is not Scriptural; but I thought it was important to say this. There's another reason that I believe Scripture is true, that it comes from the very mouth of God and that is, it makes sense. It is more rational to believe the message of Scripture than it is rational to believe the lies of this world.

Look at some of the major questions of life. Look at the questions of origins and where we come from. You can go the Big Bang Theory all you want, but the Big Bang had to start with something. What did it start with? Where did we come from? How do you explain our origins? How do you explain the appearance of design in this world when you look at pictures of galaxies or you look at pictures of cells or you look at the beauty of the trees on the mountain and you see design everywhere you look? How do you explain that without postulating a designer? How can you look at things, like there's a concept of good and there's a concept of beauty? How do you explain these things?

Scripture's explanation just makes sense to me. God did it. God put in me an understanding of that which is good. He put in me an understanding of that which is beautiful. He put in me a desire to worship him. Why does music move the human soul? "Well this is kind of how the evolutionary scum merged together and by chance the DNA formed....." Foolishness! Foolishness! God put in my heart the ability to respond to music because without it, I would not have a vehicle to praise as I ought. These are the answers of Scripture and it simply makes more sense than anything else. Scripture is historically accurate. It's internally consistent. It's full of fulfilled prophecy. It just makes sense to me. And tied up with all this, is the fact that Jesus makes better sense to me than Muhammad. Jesus makes better sense to me than Joseph Smith. Jesus makes better sense to me than Mary Baker Eddy. Scripture is the story of this Jesus who makes sense to me. So number three, my opinion and one of the reasons I believe Scripture is that it just makes sense; and I can't find anything close to it.

Number four, and this is something I think that is also implicit in the passage, why do I believe, why does Timothy believe Scripture is from the mouth of God? Ultimately, Timothy believes it. Ultimately, Timothy believes that what Paul is saying is true.

Ultimately, Timothy believes that Scripture comes from the mouth of God; and ultimately, I, and my children, and my family believe that Scripture comes from God. We believe that when we read the Bible, we hear God's voice. Please hear this carefully, this is true of any and all belief systems: It is impossible to prove the significance of ultimate reality. No matter who you talk to, theists or atheists, secularists or spiritual people, ultimately all of us make a "faith" decision because you can't prove any of this because without faith it is impossible to please God. God doesn't want to be proven. He wants to be believed.

Materialists are people who say that there is nothing outside the world of sense; that for every effect that we see, the cause of that effect is itself within the sense world. There is

nothing that is spiritual at all. Prove it! Prove it, high school teachers. Prove that there's nothing outside of the world to sense. They can't do it because it is a "faith" position. Evolutionists, and their religion surrounding it, have no doubt about that, it is a pure religion that surrounds evolution, they are giving answers to ultimate reality, but the answers are based solely on faith. They'll deny it. Ask them where the proof is. Where's the proof that over a two million year period a piece of grass that goes up to six inches high can decide for the sake of survival to become a ten-foot tree? Prove it! You can't. It's impossible. Evolution is a faith-based system. Materialism is a faith-based system. Secularism is a faith-based system. Humanism is a faith-based system. So the question of life is "which faith-based system best explains reality?" And frankly, I don't have enough faith to be an atheist. I can't believe that this world created itself with systematic evolution and built into itself a sense of meaning and purpose and ultimate destiny because a bunch of acids got together one day in a slime pool. I just don't believe it. I only have enough faith to be a Christian. I'm thankful I don't have to put my brain on a shelf. I'm thankful that there are supporting arguments, but ultimately Timothy and I believe that Scripture is from the very mouth of God. And I make no apologies for it.

III. Because Scripture is from God, it is therefore "profitable"

Paul continues in this important verse and he says that Scripture is from God and is therefore "profitable." This is the authoritative part of the doctrine of inspiration. It's profitable on one hand for theology, for determining what we teach and how we reprove. Scripture demands to be the basis for determining what we believe and rebuking those who believe differently.

The world preaches pluralism, that there are many ways to God, whatever you make him/her/it/she to be. The Bible says, "I am the Way. I am the Truth. I am the Life, and no one comes to Father but by me." Scripture is the basis of reproofing theological errors.

There are people within the church who likewise teach error; who teach that you have to be baptized to get to heaven. Scripture is our authority for our teaching and our reproof and we say that is not true. "For it is by grace that you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves but it is a gift of God, not as a result of works, lest anyone boast." Scripture is profitable for what we teach and how we reprove people who believe incorrectly.

But Scripture is also profitable for behavior, "for correction and training in righteousness." It is profitable in confronting unbiblical behavior and encouraging us towards righteous behavior. The world says, "Fit in." The world says, "Do what we do. Come to the mall." Paul says, "Be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." (Philippians 2:15)

The world says, "Touch." The world says, "Taste." The world says, "Stick your head in a garbage can." The Bible says, "Whatever is lovely and honorable and pure and excellent, then set your mind on these things." Because Scripture comes from the mouth of God, it not only is true but it also is the authoritative word for what we believe and how we behave.

IV. Ultimate Result and Applications

A. Competent

What's the ultimate result of all this? Paul concludes in verse 17: "...that the man of God may be competent [in other words, that he may be] equipped for every good work."

"Man of God" is an Old Testament expression for a messenger of God. And here specifically Paul is thinking of Timothy as a man of God, as a messenger of God, and yet by the very way he says it, he is saying, by implication, that this is true for all Christians, men and women alike.

Scripture makes us competent by equipping us for every good work. Scripture may not tell us every last little thing we could ever want to know. There are the mysteries of God that are meant to stay mysteries, Deuteronomy 29:29. And yet Scripture is sufficient for salvation; it teaches us how we are to be saved. And Scripture is sufficient for sanctification; it shows us what good works we are to do and then enables us to do that.

B. Applications

There are many applications that could be made out of this passage, obviously, but there are two I want to close with this morning.

1. I, like Timothy, have no choice but to preach the gospel. Chapter 4:2, "Preach the word; be ready in season and out." I simply don't have the option of preaching my ideas. In one sense, sermon preparation is the simplest thing I do because the whole point of my week is not to figure out what I think; the whole point of the week is to figure out what God meant when he said. Sermon preparation for me is easy.

To the best of my spirit-enabled ability, I will preach the Word. I will not put my ideas on the same level as God's. I may express my opinions at times, but I will state them as such. And if I err, I will ask for God's forgiveness. That is my commitment to you and the commitment of anyone who stands before you behind this pulpit. If they fail, you need to get rid of them because this is a non-negotiable.

My commitment is to preach the Word of God, but to preach it all the time, in season and out of season. That means, whether I want to say it or not, I have no choice because they're not my words. I don't like talking about pornography. It's sickening and disgusting and I feel dirty even saying it, but I know that I have to because the call for sexual purity is one of the primary ethical thrusts in Scripture and it's a problem that is pervasive throughout the evangelical church. I've seen the numbers and I'm not stupid. I don't like saying it, but I have to because "Thus saith the Lord."

But "in season and out of season" also applies to you and I have to preach the Word whether you want to hear it or not, because guess what, my goal is not to please you. My goal is not to tickle your ears and to say the kinds of things that you want to hear. My job is to speak the very words of God and then what you do with it is between you and him. That's my commitment to you and it has to be one of the obvious applications out of this passage.

But I'd like to make a separate, second application, and it's specifically to the men. I understand that "men of God" refers to men and women, and I am delighted, truly delighted at the course of the women's ministries in this church. I wish you could be here on Tuesday morning and see what happens in this room. There's always room for growth in any ministry, but I want to challenge men, specifically.

2. Men: I challenge you – preach the Word. Men of God preach the Word. You are called to be the head of your home and you must preach the Word to your family. That’s where discipleship starts. At dinner I challenge you to declare the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Are you doing that at the dinner table? Am I doing that at the dinner table? Are you letting your children see your devotions? Are you letting your children hear your prayers? Are you preaching the Word in whatever context you find yourself, men of God?

Back earlier in chapter 2, verse 2 Paul writes, “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” God is still looking for faithful men to whom he can entrust the proclamation of the gospel. The proclamation of the gospel in their home; the proclamation of the gospel in children’s Sunday School. We have so few men teaching Sunday School. Why? Men of God, proclaim the Word at Flight School. Men of God, proclaim the Word in adult Connection Classes; do it in men’s ministries; do it in your one-to-one discipleship. Who will accept the challenge? Who will make the commitment to mentor our new brothers in Christ? We have them coming. We have men becoming Christians. Who is there that will preach the Word, men of God, to our new young brothers? Many of you men have been silent for too long. I challenge you: Preach the Word.