I want to be very up-front with you this morning. I am one of those old-fashioned preachers who believes the Bible is free from error—not just in its lofty spiritual affirmations, but in everything it intends to teach. I have been studying the Bible almost full-time now for 50 years (I started Bible college in 1962), and I haven’t found an error in it yet. There are some issues I don’t understand; there are some problems which have not yet been fully resolved; but the history of alleged errors in the Bible reveals that the Scriptures have been vindicated time and time again. Call me a dinosaur if you will, but when history is brought to a great consummation, those who have staked their lives on God’s Word will be on the winning side. Where the Bible speaks clearly, the issue is settled for me.

This morning it is my privilege to share with you the biblical basis for this conviction. In our study through the book of 2 Timothy we have come to one of the most important verses in all the Bible about the Bible—2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is inspired of God and is profitable,” or “All Scripture is God-breathed and useful.” But for our Scripture reading we’re going to back up a little in order to grasp the full context, and we’re going to read through the end of the chapter. So let’s begin with verse 12 of 2 Timothy 3. If you are able, I invite you to stand for the reading of God’s Word:

2 Timothy 3:12-17 (ESV)

12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 But as for you, Timothy, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 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. 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.

In the first part of this chapter, as we saw last week, the Apostle Paul warns his young protégée Timothy about the Gospel-impersonators who infiltrate the Church in the last days. These people are very religious, but while exhibiting an outward form of religiosity, they deny by their lives and their doctrine the power of the Gospel. Paul was persecuted by these impostors, and he warns Timothy that he will be as well. In fact, he says, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

So what should we do when faced with persecution and opposition, especially from within the ranks of the confessing Church? Here’s Paul’s exhortation: “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.”
Are you one of those who, like Timothy, has been acquainted with the sacred writings since childhood? If so, be eternally grateful. If your mother read Egermeier’s Bible Story book to you as a child, if you memorized verses in Bible Memory Association or in AWANA, if you grew up in a home and church where the Bible was always taken seriously, you have received an enormous advantage, for the sacred writings of Scripture are unique among all the books that have ever been written, for they “are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” No other book can do that.

The whole Bible is the story of God’s plan of salvation. It tells us of man’s creation in the image of God, of his fall, through disobedience, into sin and under judgment, of God’s continuing love for him in spite of his rebellion, of God’s eternal plan to save him through his covenant with a chosen people, culminating in the advent of Jesus, Christ as Savior, who died to take man’s sin, but was then raised from the dead, ascended to heaven, sending the Holy Spirit. It tells of man’s rescue first from guilt and alienation, then from bondage, and finally from death itself. And it tells of the glorious destiny God has provided in a new heaven and new earth, needing no sun because the Son of God will be its light.

Of course, salvation is not the automatic result of learning the Scriptures, nor does Paul claim that. There are those who have been taught the Scriptures early in life but have eventually rejected the truth it proclaims. The Bible doesn’t save a person, nor should it be worshiped; rather it is the instrument God uses to bring a person to faith in Jesus. Jesus is the great theme of the Bible, Old Testament and New Testament, and He is the one who saves.

But how, some of you may be tempted to ask, can an ancient book, parts of which are 3,500 years old, written in foreign languages in a distant culture, be trustworthy, relevant and authoritative now in the 21st Century? That is the question Paul addresses in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The first truth we confront here is that . . .

**THE BIBLE CAN BE TRUSTED BECAUSE IT IS GOD’S WORD.**

“All Scripture is breathed out by God.” Perhaps the first issue we need to examine here is . . .

*What is meant by “Scripture”?* The Greek word is graphe, which means literally “writings.” Timothy would have clearly understood Paul as referring to “the sacred writings,” i.e. the Old Testament. That was the Bible of Jesus and the apostles. For centuries before Christ the Jewish people had recognized a certain body of literature as uniquely God’s Word. That included the Law (the 5 books of Moses), the Prophets (the Major and Minor prophets) and the writings (Psalms and other poetic books of the Old Testament). Seven thousand times in the Old Testament we find the words, “Thus says the Lord,” or “This is what the Lord says,” and the Jewish people understood that literally.

Jesus affirmed that the Old Testament is trustworthy and authoritative for creed and conduct. He constantly pointed people to the Scriptures with the phrase, “It is written.” He prayed to His Father, “Sanctify them in the truth; your Word is truth” (John 17:17). He claimed in the Sermon on the Mount, “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18). He accepted the Old Testament as the Word of God.
But is Paul’s statement that “All Scripture is breathed out by God” limited to the Old Testament? I do not believe so. Paul was conscious that he and the other apostles were writing Scripture as well. At times he explicitly claims to be speaking for God, as in 1 Corinthians 7:10: “To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord).” At other times he combines quotations from the Old Testament and New Testament and calls them both Scripture. For example, in 1 Timothy 5:18 he writes, “For the scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’” (The first quotation comes from Deuteronomy 25:4, while the second is from Luke 10:7, but he calls both “Scripture”).

In 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 I believe Paul actually claims verbal inspiration for what he and the other apostles were writing. Listen, “Now we (we apostles) have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.”

But perhaps the clearest evidence of all that the New Testament should be included among “the sacred writings” is found in Peter’s comment in 2 Peter 3:15-16: “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, 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.”

Clearly Peter sets Paul’s letters alongside the Old Testament and calls them both “Scripture.”

Now I don’t think we can prove in any scientific way that the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament, and only those books, are Scripture. But remarkably, every branch of Christianity—Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox—has been in agreement on the New Testament ever since the earliest centuries of the Christian era. And the only serious debate on the Old Testament concerns the Apocrypha, a collection of books the Protestant churches do not recognize as Scripture. There are many good reasons to reject the Apocrypha as Scripture, and principal among them is that they were not even officially added to the Bible until A.D. 1550 at the Council of Trent, and then only as a reaction to the Protestant Reformation.

There are world religions, of course, that claim their own scriptures, and there are cults like the Mormon Church and the Christian Science Church which have added to the Bible. In addition, every once in a while some pseudo-scholar discovers a “lost book of the Bible” that stirs up interest for a short time. We do not have the time this morning to answer those claims, though I believe that can be done satisfactorily. I would simply say that we can be confident when we read Paul’s words in 2 Timothy 3:16 that he was thinking of the Bible essentially as we know it today.

Now what does Paul affirm regarding these sacred writings? He says they are “breathed out by God” or “God-breathed.”

What is meant by “God-breathed”? I am glad that our modern versions have abandoned the KJV’s translation “inspired of God,” for that rendering has led some to conclude that what is being claimed for the Bible is that it is an inspiring book. It is that, of course, but that is not at all what
Paul is talking about. “Breathed out by God” is one word in Greek, theopneustos. (As you know I very rarely mention Greek words because I never want anyone to get the impression that the Bible is a closed book to them unless they are a scholar and are fluent in Greek and Hebrew. But every once in a while a Greek word appears that is so picturesque that it would be a shame not to comment on it).

Theopneustos is a compound word made up of the word for God (theos, from which we get theology) and the word for breath or wind or spirit (pneuma, from which we get pneumatic). When put together it means literally “God-breathed.”

OK, but what does that mean? Does it mean that the prophets and the apostles wrote books and then God breathed into those writings His power and influence, sort of placing His Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval on them? I don’t think so. I think it refers to the fact that the very origin of the content of the Bible is God Himself. He breathed out His revelation into the hearts and minds of the prophets and apostles. In fact, I wonder whether we should exchange our doctrine of inspiration for a doctrine of expiration, for that is closer to the original thought.

The apostles and prophets, in turn, wrote down the truth God wanted us to have, using their own individual vocabularies, backgrounds, and expressions. God didn’t write it Himself, though He could have (He actually did write the ten commandments on stone for Moses). He didn’t even dictate it, for if He had it would all sound alike, but it doesn’t. Any careful reading of Scripture will reveal major differences in style between the various authors though there is unity of thought and purpose. Paul’s writings are mostly very didactic and logical, while David is a poet and Jeremiah writes passionate narrative.

The differences are even more evident in the original language. I recall nearly fifty years ago when I took my first Greek class. Within six weeks I could read the Gospel of John in Greek—not fluently but with the help of a lexicon. I thought to myself, “I must be a linguistic scholar.” But after six years of Greek I still couldn’t read the Gospel of Luke? Why the difference? Because John was a fisherman and Luke was a doctor. Luke’s handwriting was terrible. (No, I’m just kidding). Luke, being highly educated, had a very technical vocabulary and used a much more complicated grammatical structure than John.

But clearly we are acknowledging that the Bible is a divine/human book. The truth originated with God but it was recorded by prophets and apostles who were ordinary sinful humans. If that is so, some would argue, then the Bible must have mistakes, for “to err is human.” How do we respond to that? There is a passage in 2 Peter 1:20-21 that helps us understand the process God used to communicate His revelation to the prophets and apostles: “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.” The term “prophecy” in this passage is not referring to predictions about the future but rather to proclamation of truth. Essentially Peter is saying that no scriptural truth is the result of a prophet or apostle figuring things out on his own as best he could. Rather he was “carried along” by the Holy Spirit as he communicated the truth revealed to Him by God.

The term “carried along” is a rather obscure term. It doesn’t tell us much regarding the mechanics of how the Holy Spirit communicated with the human authors. But at least some understanding is
gained when we realize that “carried along” is a nautical term, used of a ship carried along by the wind. The Holy Spirit is the Holy wind (that’s what pneuma means in Greek) that carried the apostles and prophets along in the right direction as they wrote Scripture.

When someone claims that the Bible cannot be without error because humans were involved in recording it, I like to share with them a profound parallel between the Living Word of God and the Written Word of God. When the conception of Jesus was announced to the Virgin Mary in Luke 1:35, the angel said, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.” The term “overshadow” here is analogous to “carry along” in 2 Peter 1. Both are somewhat mysterious terms that speak of the Holy Spirit’s sovereign and superintending work.

Consider this: the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary (an ordinary, sinful human being), enabling her to produce a perfect child, namely the Holy Son of God. The same Holy Spirit carried along the prophets and apostles, (ordinary, sinful human beings), enabling them to produce a perfect product, namely the Holy Scriptures. Just as we would never want to say that Jesus could not be sinless because He had a human mother, so we should not say that the Bible cannot be without error because it had human authors.

Evangelical theologians have come up with a definition of inspiration (or expiration), based upon the verses we have examined, that goes something like this: “The Holy Spirit superintended the human authors of the Bible so that while using their own individual personalities and vocabularies, they composed and recorded God’s revelation without error, in the words of the original manuscripts of the Bible.”

That last phrase is important, because we do not claim absolute inspiration of the KJV or the NIV or even the ESV. We don’t have any of the original manuscripts of the Bible. And for the first fifteen centuries of the Christian era there were no printing presses, so during that time all copies of any book had to be hand-written. Whenever things are copied by hand, mistakes are made. But this is not as big a problem to the Bible’s trustworthiness as one might think. The scribes who copied the Scriptures were remarkably careful, far more careful than copyists of other kinds of literature, and while a number of variant readings got into the early manuscripts, none of them affects any major doctrine. Furthermore, through careful analysis of the thousands of manuscripts that have been discovered by archaeologists, textual scholars have determined to a remarkable degree, at least 99%, the content of the original manuscripts. For all practical purposes we can say that we have the Sacred Writings as breathed out by God to the prophets and apostles in our Bibles. We have the Word of God.

I think it is also important to acknowledge that while we can speak of the Bible as being without error, our interpretations of it are not without error. We are fallible students of Scripture, especially when we bring our prejudices to the table and look for the Bible to confirm them. When we do that we can prove whatever we want. But when we allow the Scripture to speak for itself, it is absolutely trustworthy.

So the first thing our text tells us today is that the Bible can be trusted because it is the Word of God. But it says more:
THE BIBLE CAN BE TRUSTED BECAUSE IT IS PROFITABLE, FOR BOTH CREED AND CONDUCT.

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” Four purposes of Scripture are mentioned here, but I believe they fit well into two categories, creed and conduct, or we might say, doctrine and duty. I like the way John Stott expresses it: “As for our creed, Scripture is profitable ‘for teaching the truth and refuting error’. As for our conduct, it is profitable ‘for reformation of manners and discipline in right living’.”

**Creed.**
The first profitable purpose of Scripture is for teaching, for learning. This means that we must get our world view, our belief system, our values, our perspectives from Scripture or they will be distorted. It doesn’t matter what topic you’re dealing with—marriage, family, interpersonal relationships, work, leisure, money, sex, nature, sin, salvation, eternal destiny—you need God’s revelation in order to get it right. The Bible, of course, doesn’t speak directly to every specific issue we face, but it always offers principles that inform our decisions.

Please do not overlook that when Paul speaks of the profitability of Scripture, the word “all” modifies that, too. All Scripture is profitable. We do not have the right to pick and choose what parts of the Bible we consider important or useful. We must preach and believe the whole counsel of God. Our spiritual diet must include the Old Testament as well as the New, the Epistles as well as the Gospels, prophecy as well as narrative. There is a pastor whose name every one of you would recognize if I mentioned it. He is a speaker in much demand, he has written scores of books, he is thoroughly Gospel-centered. He has preached through every book of the New Testament multiple times and has commentaries published on every one of them. I read them regularly. But in 45 years of preaching he has preached through only two books of the Old Testament—Daniel and Zechariah—both prophetic books. Oh, he has done scattered sermons on individual passages of other Old Testament books, but my cursory examination of his website indicated that less than 5 percent of all his preaching was from the Old Testament, though it is 2/3 of the Bible! I have even heard him say that he is called to preach Christ, and that is why He sticks with the New Testament. But Christ is the theme of the Old Testament also—of Genesis and Joshua and 2 Chronicles and Job. Paul says all Scripture is profitable for teaching.

Now the other side of teaching is reproof. Those who teach or preach God’s Word cannot escape this duty. We must talk about sin, we must challenge the status quo, we must force people to ask themselves hard questions. Frankly, it is for lack of teaching of the whole counsel of God, and the reproof that goes with it, that the church is soft and anemic and has so often fallen into error.

**Conduct.**
All Scripture is “profitable ... for correction, and for training in righteousness.” “Correction” comes from the Greek term meaning “to straighten out.” Those who are willing to be taught by the Scriptures and accept its reproof will find their lives being straightened out. It’s absolutely amazing how twisted and messed up our lives can become. We don’t set out to screw up. We don’t get up one morning and say to ourselves, “I wonder how I could really destroy my marriage or ruin my kids’ lives or go broke.” But sometimes it happens. One thing leads to another and
pretty soon we’re sitting on the outside looking in and saying, “How can I ever recover my sanity, my family, my health, my financial stability.”

Friends, the Scriptures have the answers. I don’t know anywhere else you’re going to find the answers. Oh, some self-help guru may enable you to “find yourself,” whatever that means, and you may get back on your feet in some area of life, but if you want to really live, if you want to enjoy the abundant life Jesus talked about in John 10:10, you need the correction of God’s Word.

Along with that comes training or discipline in righteousness. Sanctification is not an event, you know; it’s a process, a lifetime process. It involves disciplines like prayer, Bible study, solitude, worship, confession, forgiveness of others, etc. And at the very heart of that process is God’s Word. Listen to the words of Psalm 19: 7-11.

**Psalm 19:7-11 (ESV)**

7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
8 the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
9 the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.
10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Finally this morning I want us to see that . . .

**THE BIBLE CAN BE TRUSTED BECAUSE IT EQUIPS THE BELIEVER FOR SERVICE.**

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable … that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” The goal of all Bible study should be life-change, maturity, and service. If all we do is listen to sermons and read commentaries without any application or service, we will sit and soak and sour. But as Ephesians 2:10 states, “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Good works are, of course, very popular even in the liberal church, but the question is motive. Are they being done out of guilt? Or out of pride? Or to earn God’s favor? If so, they are nothing more than filthy rags in God’s perspective, as Isaiah wrote. (Is. 64:6) But good works done from the motive of the love of Christ are beautiful and pleasing to God. The Scriptures equip us for every good work and help us to do it from proper motives.

**Is there external evidence that confirms the Bible as trustworthy?**

We’ve seen what the Bible claims for itself, but is it possible those are just empty claims, or is there evidence that confirms it? We could spend an hour on this point alone, but we don’t have that, so allow me to speak briefly about five lines of evidence.
1. **The evidence of the Bible’s amazing unity.** The Bible was written by 40 authors over a period of at least 1,500 years, perhaps as many as 2,000, from different races, languages, cultures and perspectives and yet the book is perfectly consistent. It tells one story of salvation.

2. **The evidence of its incredible historical accuracy.** The two greatest archaeologists of the 20th century are probably Nelson Glueck of Hebrew Union College and William F. Albright of Johns Hopkins University. Though neither man made any claim to be an evangelical (Glueck was Jewish), both of them agreed concerning the remarkable historical accuracy of the Bible. In fact, Nelson Glueck wrote, “It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible. And, by the same token, proper evaluation of Biblical descriptions has often led to amazing discoveries.”

Consider the Hittites. They are mentioned at least 58 times in the Old Testament, particularly in the Pentateuch and the historical books, but for centuries biblical critics scoffed at these references since they had found no record of Hittite in secular history. But in the second half of the 19th century archaeologists uncovered not only the existence of the Hittites, but also their language, their culture, and their huge impact on Egypt and the Holy Land. Today I am told one can get a Ph.D. in Hittite at Harvard University.

3. **The evidence of its fulfilled prophecy.** Josh McDowell has compiled hundreds of detailed prophecies in the Bible that have been fulfilled in detail. Consider the amazing prophecies about Christ in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. Liberals long scorned the prophetic portions of the book of Isaiah, almost uniformly claiming that the book had to be written by at least two Isaiahs, more likely three, with the last one writing the prophecies about Christ long after the events occurred, perhaps 700 years after Isaiah’s day. Then the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 11 caves along the Dead Sea starting in 1947. Among the hundreds of scrolls there was one of the entire book of Isaiah, including chapter 53. These scrolls were dated by everyone, including the critics, at least a century and a half before Christ!

4. **The evidence of its survivability.** No book has faced more opposition than the Bible, but despite periodic attempts to stamp out the Scriptures, over 2 billion have been printed.

5. **The evidence of its high moral and ethical teaching.** The Bible is actually being taken to task for its moral and ethical teaching (for example, on abortion, capital punishment, homosexuality, divorce, etc.), but I don’t think that says as much about the Bible as it does about the direction our culture is heading. As I said at the beginning of my message, when history is brought to a great consummation, I believe those who have staked their lives on God’s Word will be on the winning side.

As we close this morning, I want you to think with me about the uniqueness of the Bible. There are many in our day who speak of it as an admirable work of literature, a good book though flawed. Modern science and sociology and psychology have rendered much of it outdated. I think the best way to respond to such a view is the same way many of us were taught to respond to those who view Jesus as a great man, though flawed. We were taught the three “L’s”: liar, lunatic, or Lord. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. If he made this claim knowing He was not, then He was a
liar. If He believed the claim when He was not, then He was a lunatic. But if He really was the Son of God, then He is Lord and should be honored as such.

The same logic applies to the claim that the Bible is a good book, though flawed. It claims to be the very Word of God. Either this is a lie, or sheer lunacy, or the Bible is indeed what it claims to be, and it should be honored as the unique and authoritative Word of God. Do not speak of it as merely “a good book.”

The book of Deuteronomy tells us that when Moses had finished writing the words of the law and had given it to the Levites to place beside the Ark of the Covenant, he said to them: “Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you; they are your life…” (Deut. 32:46-47).

I have sat with many people in their final hours and have yet to hear one say, “I wasted too much time in Bible study and spiritual pursuits—I wish I had given myself more to pleasure or work or hobbies.” I have heard many say the opposite. Study it, believe it, meditate upon it, live it. You will not be sorry.

---


ii. In fact, I suspect that is why he added the term “all” here in verse 16. If he were thinking only of the Old Testament he could have simply said, “the sacred writings are breathed out by God,” and his audience would have clearly understood him to mean the entire Old Testament. By adding “all” he is including more than the Old Testament.

iii. Interestingly, the Catholic Church claims that Jesus could be sinless only if his mother was sinless, so they posit the Immaculate Conception, the view that Mary herself was conceived without sin, which is taught nowhere in the Bible. This, of course, fails to explain how Mary could be sinless unless her mother was also sinless. At the same time, the Catholic Church does not affirm the inerrancy of Scripture, except as interpreted by the Church.

iv. Stott, 103.
