

**What If it's True?**  
*The Bible Has Answers to My Problems*

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**Text:**

2 Timothy 3:10-17 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, <sup>11</sup> my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. <sup>12</sup> Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, <sup>13</sup> while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. <sup>14</sup> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

**Introduction:**

The first phrase of our text that we want to grapple with is found in v. 15, “the sacred writings (Scriptures), which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” Can the Bible save postmoderns? Can it make them wise unto salvation?

For decades now, evangelical evangelism has proceeded with the presupposition that Christianity is a rational belief system superior to all other rational systems. Thus, one needed only to enter into debate comparing all other systems with Christianity. The assumption, of course, was that Christianity would in the end win the day. If Christianity is not rational, then it is not worthy of belief. So ran the premise. But it can run no longer.

The problem facing today’s evangelism is that we live in a culture that has abandoned the idea of belief altogether. Culture has shifted. Rationality is no longer a useful test for belief. If we are going to evangelize our postmodern culture, we must start the conversation at a different point. The entry-gate questions for evangelism are no longer, “Does God exist?” or “Is Jesus God?” or “Did Jesus rise from the dead?” or “Is the Bible accurate?” The questions have changed. We cannot simply begin with the proofs for the existence of God, the deity of Christ, the resurrection of Jesus, the possibility of miracles; we may not begin with the assumption that they embrace biblical categories; we must begin much earlier. Perhaps the new entry-gate question must be, “Why should anyone believe anything at all?”

The question: “Why should anyone believe anything at all?” gets to the heart of the postmodern problem. Postmodernism has been described well by the following fictitious exchange: “I’m O.K. You’re O.K. And that’s O.K. O.K.?”

If culture has shifted so that rationality is no longer a legitimate ground for belief, what can evangelicals do in their evangelism? The loudest answer coming forward is to capitulate. Perhaps we should ignore rational arguments; go for emotional music, drama, clever rhetoric, psychological or sociological manipulation.

But there is one primary truth that keeps us from capitulation: It is dangerous to ignore the mind because God has addressed his revelation to the mind.

- Isaiah 1:18-19 (ESV)  
<sup>18</sup> “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. <sup>19</sup> If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land;
- Luke 24:45 (ESV)  
<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,
- Romans 8:5 (ESV)  
<sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.
- Romans 12:2 (ESV)  
<sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.
- Romans 14:5 (ESV)  
<sup>5</sup> One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.
- 2 Corinthians 4:4 (ESV)  
<sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.
- Ephesians 4:23 (ESV)  
<sup>23</sup> and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,
- Mark 12:30 (ESV)  
<sup>30</sup> And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’

**The heart will not soon follow what the mind does not believe is true.**

Where shall we start the conversation? Let me suggest one way the conversation might go:

While belief might not be confessed in this world, knowledge is. Everyone knows they know! The question is what do they know? And more fundamentally, what is the basis of knowledge? How do you know you know? No matter how we slice it, the answer must be something like: all knowledge is based on belief. James A. Sire makes this clear in a lecture on belief structure. He says that a knowledge based on belief is true in every area of life whether we confess the belief or not. For example:

- In ordinary life, how can you be sure you are awake and not dreaming?
- In science, how can you be sure that you really see what your eyes read on the instruments? Can you really trust your vision?
- In philosophy, how can you be sure that the law of non-contradiction applies to reality?
- In religion, how can you know whether there is a god/God?

The answer is that in each of these cases our knowledge rests on some kind of commitment that we do not need to have proven. We simply assume it true. We believe it without question. **Find something a person says they know for sure and you can reduce it to some form of a belief.**

But what justifies these beliefs? And, do we even need to have them?

All I am trying to demonstrate is that to say belief is not necessary flies in the face of reality, for all people believe something or knowledge is impossible.

Once we establish that belief is actually a given, maybe we need to move to a more fundamental question: why do people believe what they believe? The answers can range in nature, but largely fall under four categorical headings:

- for sociological reasons (parents, friends, society, culture),
- for psychological reasons (comfort, peace of mind, meaning, purpose, hope, identity),
- for religious reasons (Scripture, pastors, churches, guru, channeler), or
- for philosophical reasons (consistency [logic], coherence, completeness [best handles the evidence]).

How strong are these reasons? If you say that the only reason you believe what you believe is because of your *parents*, is that a good, strong reason for believing, or is it weak? Nearly everyone would answer that parents alone would be a weak reason.

- They admit that it would mean the belief is not truly *theirs*
- They admit it would be weak because their parents might be *wrong*

So I would suggest that we hold these kinds of questions up to each of these reasons for belief. What about friends? Society? Culture?

Is *comfort* a strong reason for believing what you believe? I mean attend any funeral where they seem to draw comfort in believing their loved one is in heaven. They believe what they believe because it brings them comfort. **But the only way comfort can be a strong reason for believing something is if comfort points to truth.** How can my heart (i.e. my emotions) rest in true comfort while holding to something that my mind does not believe to be true? Do you see?

Oh...but wait a minute...By asking such questions, we have just carried the dialogue into the category of **truth and non-truth**. This is precisely where the postmodern does not want to go and the precise place I, as an evangelical witness, want to be. We want to bring all conversations into the categories for truth so that we can apply normal apologetics to rational truth claims. Christianity is the most rational of worldviews.

You see, we started the conversation further back, but we brought it ahead to the point where rationality is necessary. Of all the reasons we have for believing, only one stands up to every rational test – Scripture – and not just any scripture (sacred writing, e.g., Koran, Book of Mormon, Upanishads) but the Christian Bible. The Bible alone is the sole source for truth intended to govern and guide the existence of mankind.

We now want to move to vv.16-17 of our text:

<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

Let us begin by defining three critical terms: *revelation*, *inspiration*, and *inerrancy*

(1) **Revelation** is the activity of God by which he unveils or discloses or makes known what is, to humanity, otherwise unknowable. It is God making himself known to those shaped in his image. Revelation is what God does, not what mankind achieves.

Theologian J.I. Packer says, “Revelation does not mean man finding God, but God finding man, God sharing His secrets with us, God showing us Himself. In revelation, God is the agent as well as the object” (Packer, *God Has Spoken*, 47).

The God of the Bible, notes Donald Bloesch, “is not a God who is discovered in the depths of nature or uncovered in human consciousness. Nor is he a God who is immediately discernible in the events of history, . . . For the living God to be known, he must make himself known, and he has done this in the acts and words recorded in Scripture” (*A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 20).

Now listen well. The revelation of God in Scripture is both *propositional* and *personal*. That is to say, that Scripture reveals propositional truths so that one may know things about the person of God; and it reveals God himself. Through the Bible one can both know about God and know God. Listen again to J.I. Packer

“Personal friendship between God and man grows just as human friendships do – namely, through talking; and talking means making informative statements, and informative statements are propositions. . . . [Indeed] to say that revelation is non-propositional is actually to *depersonalize* it. . . . To maintain that we may know God without God actually speaking to us in words is really to deny that God is personal, or at any rate that knowing Him is a truly personal relationship” (Packer, 52-3).

In other words, revelation is a *verbal* activity, in the sense that “God has communicated with man by means of significant utterances: statements, questions, and commands, spoken either in His own person or on His behalf by His own appointed messengers and instructors” (Packer, 63).

Let us not forget that faith is often portrayed in Scripture as trusting, often against great odds, what God has **said** – see Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; Heb. 6:13ff.; 11:8-13,17; 11:33.

(2) **Inspiration**, The Holy Spirit *superintended* the writing of Scripture, that is to say, he acted to insure that what the human authors intended by their words is equivalent to what God intended. Thus “each resultant oracle was as truly a divine utterance as a human, as direct a disclosure of what was in God’s mind as of what was in the prophet’s” (Packer, 91). The Spirit thus brought the free and spontaneous thoughts of the human author into coincidence with the thoughts of God.

The doctrine of **verbal, plenary** (i.e., complete, total) *inspiration* means that the words of the Bible are the words of God. This doesn’t mean that God spoke every word himself, but that the words spoken by the authors of Scripture are the words that God desired them to speak in the revelation of himself. Thus there is no significant difference between the ultimate authority of God and the immediate authority of Scripture. “The authority of Scripture is the divine authority of God Himself speaking” (96).

(3) **Inerrancy** - “Inerrancy” comes from the Latin *inerrantia* = freedom from error. This means that Scripture does not affirm anything contrary to fact. Together they express the idea that all Scripture comes to us as the very words of God and are thus reliable and true and free of error. Here are four explanations of the concept of inerrancy as it is applied to all of Scripture:

“Inerrancy will then mean that at no point in what was originally given were the biblical writers allowed to make statements or endorse viewpoints which are not in conformity with objective truth. This applies at any level at which they make pronouncements” (Roger Nicole, “The Nature of Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, 88).

“Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences” (Paul Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” 294).

“When all the facts are known, the Bible (in its original writings) properly interpreted in light of which culture and communication means had developed by the time of its composition will be shown to be completely true (and therefore not false) in all that it affirms, to the degree of precision intended by the author, in all matters relating to God and his creation” (David Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, 64).

2 Timothy 3:16-17 is crucial to the doctrine of inerrancy:

(1) “all” or “every” – The word “all” has a collective sense and means the whole of Scripture; the entirety of the Bible, inclusive of all its parts. The word “every” has a distributive sense and means each Scripture individually, the various parts of the Bible of which the whole is comprised. Whether it be “all” Scripture or “every” Scripture Paul is saying that whatever is Scripture is God-breathed.

(2) Meaning of *theopneustos*? The word “inspiration” can be misleading, for it might suggest to some an already existent text into which God breathed or to which he imparted some special spiritual or divine quality. The word actually means “breathed out from God” not “breathed into by God”. The Scriptures are a product of the divine breath (origin). The Scriptures find their origin in God, not in the creative genius of humans. In the OT the “breath” of God is his creative power (cf. Job 32:8; 33:4; 34:14). See also Gen. 2:7; Ps. 33:6.

There are several factors in the evangelical doctrine of inerrancy:

- It is no objection to inerrancy that God used sinful, error-prone human beings in the process of inscripturation.
- It is no objection to inerrancy that sometimes the Bible describes things as they *appear*.
- It is no objection to inerrancy that God often accommodates himself to human language and experience when making known his will and ways in Scripture.
- It is no objection to inerrancy that the Bible contains figures of speech.
- It is no objection to inerrancy that the Bible is not equally clear in every place.
- It is no objection to inerrancy that the Bible records lies and unethical actions. We must distinguish between what the Bible merely *reports* and what it *approves*, between *descriptive* authority and *normative* authority.
- It is no objection to inerrancy that authors of the NT cite or allude to the OT with less than verbal precision.
- It is no objection to inerrancy that the authors of Scripture round off or approximate numbers and measurements.
- It is no objection to inerrancy if two authors record the same event from differing perspectives and for different purposes.

So, why is this doctrine or concept of Scripture as verbally, plenary, and inerrantly inspired so critical?

Church, we must subject our souls to the infallibility and authority of the Scriptures, immerse our minds in its truths, and bathe our spirits in its teachings because the inerrant special revelation of God in Scripture has the *power* to change human lives and to transform the experience of the church.

- The Word of God is the means or instrument by which the Holy Spirit regenerates the human heart. That is to say, the proclamation or communication of the Word is the catalyst

for the inception of spiritual life. See **1 Peter 1:23-25**. Observe that this "word" which brings life is a "preached" word!

1 Peter 1:23-25 (ESV)

<sup>23</sup> since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; <sup>24</sup> for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, <sup>25</sup> but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

- The Word of God is the power of God unto salvation. See especially **Romans 1:16-17**; 10:14-15; and 1 Cor. 1:18-25.

Romans 1:16-17 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

- The Word of God is the spring from which the waters of faith arise. Paul says in Rom. 10:17 that "faith comes from hearing" and that hearing comes "by the word of Christ."

Apologetics has its place in evangelizing postmoderns and secularists, but it is ultimately the Gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed through the pages of Scripture that carries the power of God for opening blind eyes and causing men and women to understand the Scriptures.

- It is from or through the Scriptures that the Spirit imparts perseverance and encouragement: "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through *perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures* we might have hope" (Romans 15:4).
- It is from or through the Scriptures that joy, peace, and hope arise. How so? Paul prays in Romans 15:13 that God would "fill you with all joy and peace **in believing**, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Both joy and peace are the fruit of *believing*, which in turn yields hope. But believe "what"? Belief is confidence placed in the truth of what God has revealed to us in Scripture about who He is and our relationship to Him through Jesus. Belief does not plant itself in mid-air, but in the firm foundation of inspired, revelatory words inscripturated for us in the Bible.
- It is the Word of God, expounded and explained and applied, that yields the fruit of sanctification and holiness in daily life. Consider the following:

Notice the four words in our text that demonstrate the usefulness of Scripture for sanctification:

- Teaching – Show right
- Reproof – See wrong
- Correction – Set right
- Training – Stay right

We are a people of the book. We are born from above by hearing the book. We move forward in our sanctification by the book and we advance the kingdom by the book. Does your life manifest your dependence upon the book?