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The Bible; Trustworthy or Fallible? - Part 2

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The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier

John Stott investigates how of the thousands who saw Jesus when He was on earth, some wrote eye witness accounts which we now have as the four Gospels.

Transcript

The Bible then is not a textbook of science. It is a textbook of salvation. Not that it is contradictory to science, but rather that God's purpose has been to reveal in and through Scripture not what scientists can discover by themselves through the empirical method, but what no human being could possibly discover by himself unless God reveals it.

That is the purpose of Scripture is to reveal what cannot be discovered by human beings. In other words, it measures on salvation and not on science. Welcome to the Bible for Today with John Stot.

As the most respected clergyman in the world, according to Billy Graham, and one of the 100 most influential people in the world according to Time magazine, there has perhaps been no one who has raised the standard of biblical teaching in the 20th century as John Stot. An extremely humble man known affectionately to many as Uncle John, he was a pastor to pastors and a servant of the Global Church. From his home church of all souls Langham Place in Central London, he preached over 600 sermons.

And during this his centenary, we are bringing you some of his very best teaching from nearly 60 years of ministry. Last week we saw that the Bible is the primary source of Christianity, and that if this foundation is not trustworthy, our faith will surely crumble. John Stot showed us where the scriptures we have originated from, how they came from God through human beings by the Holy Spirit.

John's message is based on two Timothy chapter three, which you'll find helpful to have open in front of you as he explains the key verse on this vital subject. All scripture literally is God breathed, breathed out of the mouth of God. All scripture is God breathed.

Now I have to begin by saying that that is the correct translation. In two respects, some of the English versions are mistaken. The new English Bible translates every inspired scripture is useful.

What an extraordinary translation is if there are some scriptures are inspired and other scriptures are uninspired and the inspired scriptures are useful and the uninspired are not useful. That's the implication of that translation. That is an incorrect translation.

For a couple of reasons, one is that the very word scripture means inspired writing. In those days you use the word scripture. Anybody with a Jewish background would have known that scripture is inspired writing to talk about uninspired scripture is a contradiction in terms.

And there is another reason, and that is this in the Greek sentence, there is the little word and. All scripture is God breathed and profitable. In other words, Paul is making two affirmations, but the new English Bible emits the little word and and says every inspired scripture is profitable, whereas the end gone.

They have no authority to drop it out like that. It's tendentious. Know what Paul says is that all scripture is God breathed and profitable.

So he is referring to the Herlest scripture, not just parts of it. And the second thing is this, the word inspired by God is in the revised standard version or five words in the King James Version given by inspiration of God. Well, one wouldn't say they're incorrect, but they're misleading.

What the text actually says, it is a beautiful word, is that all scripture is God breathed. One word. It is an assertion that scripture is God's word breathed out of the mouth of God.

So strictly speaking, we don't believe in the inspiration, but in the expiration of scripture. It is not that God breathed into the writers or the writings, but that what they wrote or spoke was breathed out of his mouth. Now, my friends, this is a powerful imagery.

Imagery it is. It's not literal. God is spirit.

He has no body. And since he has no body, he has no mouth. And since he has no mouth, he has no breath.

It is not literal, but it is powerful imagery taken from the model of human speech. And human speech is expressive of what we call inspiration, the inspiration of scripture and teaches these truths. A, scripture is God speaking his mind.

Now, think about that with me. Isn't that the whole purpose of speech? What is speech? Speech is the communication between one mind and another mind. That's what's

happening at this moment.

Your minds and my mind are in communication with each other. How are they in communication? By the words that I'm speaking, speech is the communication of minds with one another. Words disclose one mind to another mind.

If I were to say to you, I'm going to give you a piece of my mind. I think you know what would be coming, some pretty strong words. But the only way I can give you a piece of my mind is by speaking to you.

Our minds are private territory. If we want to, we can guard our minds against all trespass and intrusion. If you have any secrets, I know where you keep them in your mind.

That's where all secrets are kept. And if somebody comes to you one day when you look perplexed and says, "What's on your mind?" You have two options. Either you can say, "I'm not going to tell you," in which case you remain silent, or you can say, "Well, I will tell you," in which case you will speak.

If I were to stand in the pulpit tonight silent, you wouldn't have the foggiest idea what was going on in my mind. For all you know I might be singing carols next Sunday, or eating turkey and plum pudding on Christmas day, or watching birds in Africa. You wouldn't know what I was doing if I was silent.

My mind is a secret to you. But at this very moment, you do know what is going on in my mind because I'm speaking to you. And I'm conveying to you the thoughts of my mind by the words of my mouth.

Now, if human minds are undiscoverable, except through speech, how much more must that be true of the infinite mind of God? As we headed in the first lesson tonight, God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so the thoughts in my mind are higher than the thoughts in your mind." There is an infinite gulf yawning between the mind of God and our minds. There is no ladder by which we can climb up into the infinite mind of God. It is unattainable.

It is undiscoverable unless he has spoken. If God has spoken, he has spoken his mind. He has revealed his mind in words.

And that's what the Scripture says. You know the great words at the beginning of Hebrew is one that God who has spoken olden days to the Father through the prophets in these last days has spoken to us in his Son. And as other passages make clear also in the apostolic testimony to his Son.

So God has clothed his thoughts in words. That is what he's meant when it says that all Scripture is God breathed. God has breathed out words from his mouth and the words of

his mouth have communicated the thoughts in his mind.

And that is why Scripture is reliable because it is the word of God and God does not lie. But that's only the first thing. All Scripture is God breathed teaches.

There is a second. Not only that Scripture is God speaking his mind, but that God is speaking his mind through the human authors. For when God breathed out his words, he didn't breathe them into the ether.

He didn't shout audibly out of a clear blue sky. He didn't write documents and leave them around for people to discover as Joseph Smith claimed to have discovered the golden plates of the Book of Mormon. No, God spoke his words through human words, the words of the human authors of Scripture.

So his words were uttered through their words. Moreover, in this process to be called inspiration, God did not ask the human authors to take down some dictation as the Muslims believed that Allah said to Muhammad, dictating every word of the Quran in Arabic. No, under contrary, when God spoke, breathed out his words through the human authors, the human authors were using their faculties freely.

They engaged in historical research. Luke tells us that he did. They expressed themselves in terms appropriate to the cultural milieu in which they lived.

They developed their own syntax and vocabulary and literary style. They made their own theological emphases appropriate to their character and their background and temperament. So they were using their faculties freely when God was speaking his words through their words.

Now that leads us to affirm the double authorship of Scripture. Tye long that people should understand this. It's the Bible's own account of itself, that the Bible is the Word of God through the words of men.

The New Testament says equally God spoke through men and men spoke from God. Both are true. Indeed, the Bible is God's Word through human words.

So when we say or when Paul says that all Scripture is God breathed, he means that he breathed these words out of his own mouth through the mouths of the human authors. So again you find reference to both mouths in the Scripture. You have the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.

Or you have as the Holy Spirit says through the mouth of David. What is it the mouth of God or the mouth of David? Answer it's both mouths. It's God speaking through human words.

So we must preserve this balance. Never say the Bible is the Word of God full stop.

Without adding, it's the Word of God through the words of men.

Don't say it's the words of men. You have to say it's the Word of God through the words of men. So on the one hand God spoke, deciding himself what he wanted to say.

But as he said it, he did not destroy or smother the personality of the human authors. On the other hand men spoke from God using their faculties freely, yet not in such a way as to distort the message of the divine author. So the Bible is trustworthy.

Why? Because it's God breathed the Word of God through the words of men. Now I've deliberately spent my longest part of what time is allocated to me on this first point. All Scripture is God breathed.

May God enable us to believe it and hold first to it. But the second is this, all Scripture is profitable. All Scripture is God breathed and profitable and it is profitable because it is God breathed.

It is profitable for us because it has been breathed out by God and its profit is spoken of clearly here. Again I have to subdivide A verse 15, it enlightens us for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. And B verse 16 and 17, it equips us for every good work.

Briefly then, A it enlightens us for salvation. You've got the phrase in verse 15. From childhood you've been acquainted with the sacred writings which you're able to enlighten or instruct you, make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Bible then is not a textbook of science. It is a textbook of salvation. Not that it is contradictory to science, but rather that God's purpose has been to reveal in and through Scripture not what scientists can discover by themselves through the empirical method, but what no human being could possibly discover by himself unless God reveals it.

That is the purpose of Scripture is to reveal what cannot be discovered by human beings. In other words, it measures on salvation and not on science. And salvation is a big word.

It includes the totality of God's purpose for us, not only in the forgiveness of our sins and our reconciliation to God, but in our growth in Christ-likeness of character and conduct until that day when we're given new bodies and translated, as it were, to a new world and God's salvation purpose is complete. And that salvation is through faith in Christ Jesus. So since the Bible is a book of salvation and since salvation is in Christ Jesus, therefore the Bible focuses on Jesus Christ.

And we need to learn wherever we are in Scripture to look for Christ. The Old Testament foretells and foreshadows him. The gospels tell the story of his birth and life and words and works and death and resurrection.

The acts tell what he continued to do as the ascended Lord through the apostles, Yomiah Chorson. The epistles unfurl the fullness of his divine human glory and of his saving work. And the book of Revelation is full of Christ.

The Scriptures bear witness to Christ because the Scripture is a book of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. So don't any look for Christ in Scriptures, but when you find him, go to him. Put your trust in him, flee to him.

Lay your head upon his breast, find in him all that you need, the fulfillment of every human aspiration. That is the purpose of Scripture. So to bear witness to Christ, just to persuade us to go to Christ and to find life in Christ.

Scripture enlightens us for salvation and B) Scripture equips us for every good work. It's profitable. You notice what Paul goes on to say in verse 16.

It's profitable. He uses four words, teaching, reproof and correction and training and righteousness. I think one and three and two and four go together in pairs.

Scripture is profitable for teaching the truth and correcting error. And Scripture is profitable for the rebuking of evil and the training of righteousness. In other words, Scripture not only leads to salvation, but it shows us the truth of God and the righteousness of God.

And by opening up to us the fullness of truth and righteousness, it equips us for every good work. It equips the man of God. A phrase used in the Old Testament, of Moses and of Elijah and of Daniel and other leaders.

It really refers to the Christian leader. And Christian leaders cannot grow into maturity without the Scriptures. It's the Scriptures that will lead them into every good work and equip them for the labor to which God has called them.

But of course, it's applicable to all Christians, whatever their possession of leadership may be. But no Christian who neglects the Scriptures will ever grow into maturity. Well, if you got those two things, all Scripture is God breathed and all Scripture is profitable.

It's profitable to us because it is breathed out by God. Now, as I conclude, the divine origin and the human usefulness of Scripture are two powerful arguments why we should take it seriously. So here's the conclusion quickly.

One, let's continue in the Word ourselves. Don't miss that word in verse 14, but as for you, Timothy, continue. Continue in what you have learned, knowing from whom you learned it.

It's plural. It probably refers to his mother and grandmother, but also to the apostle Paul, his great teacher. But continue.

Continue in the Word. Is there some young Christian here who is tempted to give up confidence about the Bible? Some theological student who is being led astray by his liberal teachers. I say to you in the name of Christ, my brother or sister, continue in the Word.

Knowing from whom you have learned it, never mind what the other people say. Never mind if the word ridicules you. Never mind if your theological teachers pour scorn upon you.

Never mind if everybody turns away. As for you, continue faithful in the Word. So let's learn to sit at the feet of Jesus, listening to his Word like Mary.

Let the Bible be in our hands constantly and in our hearts. That's the first thing. Second, let's teach the Word to the children.

Timothy was very lucky. Paul reminds him that from childhood, he had known the Scriptures. Timothy was lucky because in the providence of God he had a godly mother and a godly grandmother who taught him the Scriptures from his babyhood, his Calvin writes in his commentary.

He'd sucked in the Scriptures with his mother's milk. Parents here never surrender the religious education of your children to school or to Sunday school. Thank God for Sunday school.

It supplements your teaching. Thank God for any day school in which the Scriptures are taught. But the responsibility for bringing up your children is your responsibility.

Never surrender it to anybody else. And let us be among those who recover the lost practice of family devotions and family Bible reading at least once a week, hopefully every day. Let's teach the Word to the children.

And thirdly, let's preach the Word to the world. Chapter 4 verse 2, "Preach the Word." This God breathed Scripture he's been talking about. "Preach it.

Make it known. Lift up your voice and let the world hear the Word." So this is God's will. The Bible in our hands and in our hearts.

The Bible in our homes and in our family life and the Bible in the world as we make it known to every nation with its good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Let us pray. In silence, perhaps we need to make a fresh resolve to continue in the Word ourselves to read and study it and obey it.

A new resolve to teach it to our children. And for young people not yet married and without children resolve to teach your children when God gives them to you. And a resolve to preach it to proclaim this Word, sharing it with our friends and relatives, our

neighbors and our colleagues.

They're making it known. Lord forgive us for our neglect of your Word and enable us to be faithful in the days to come for the glory of your great name. You've been listening to the conclusion of a message by John Stott on why we can trust the Bible and the responsibility we therefore have to tell others about it.

This message from to Timothy is vital for all Christians to understand and there's much more on this subject in the commentary John Stott wrote entitled The Message of to Timothy. It's part of the Bible Speak Today commentary series of which there are more details on our website where you can also watch videos of John Stott preaching. Just visit premierchristenradio.com/JohnStott The legacy of John Stott lives on and is growing touching every level of society across the world.

Today Christian leaders throughout the majority world are being equipped to provide pastor training and resources in their own countries thanks to the vision of John Stott who donated all his book royalties to support this ministry through Langham Partnership. To find out about this at other ministries John Stott founded go to premier.org.uk/JohnStott. Join us at the same time next week for more from the Bible for today with John Stott.

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