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The Bible; Trustworthy or Fallible? - Part 1

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The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier

John Stott shows that in a world of relativism there is absolute truth to be found in the Bible, and why the Bible can be seen to be completely infallible.

Transcript

[Music] Authority, nowadays, is a dirty word. People dislike it and resent it. The scientific theory of relativity has been quite illegitimately applied to the realms of truth and righteousness.

Now everything is relative to it. To everything else, there are no absolutes any longer where to. Neither of truth or of morality.

There is nothing that has binding authority upon our minds or upon our lives.

[Music] Welcome to The Bible for Today with John Stot. The 20th century gave us a number of great evangelical Bible teachers, and for many, John Stottt stood above them all.

Perhaps no one raised the standard of biblical teaching as did Stot. When a TV reporter once asked him, "You've had a brilliant academic career, a first of Cambridge, rector at 29, chaplain to the Queen," "What's your ambition now?" John replied, "To be more like Jesus." It was Jesus Christ that he made preeminent in all his teaching. Whenever he preached his home church of all souls, Langham Place, it was packed, and people even sat on the stair hairs.

During John Stot's centenary, we are bringing you some of his finest Bible teaching from almost 60 years of ministry.

[Music] Early Christianity can be discovered from a wide variety of sources, including archaeology and ancient secular writings, where Christianity is ultimately based on just one book, The Bible. But if this primary source is unreliable, the Christian faith will surely crumble.

So this raises a very important question. Is the Bible trustworthy or fallible? Is it completely reliable, or can it be disproved? Well, John Stot will be addressing this critical issue over the next two weeks. We have before us tonight a vital question indeed.

The Bible trustworthy or fallible. That is to say, will it lead you astray, or can you rely upon its teaching? I have two introductory remarks to make, and the first concerns the immense importance of the question to which we give our minds this evening. It is not an exaggeration to say that every aspect of Christian discipleship is affected by it.

How can we worship God as we are seeking to do tonight if we don't know who he is or the kind of worship that pleases him? How can we trust God if we are ignorant of his character and of his promises? How can we obey God if we don't know his commandments? How can we unite churches if there is no common basis of truth on which to unite them? And how can we evangelize the world if we have no certainty about the eventual? There are five aspects of Christian discipleship. Christian worship, faith, obedience, unity, and mission are all seriously impoverished, if not completely undermined, if the Bible is not authoritative and trustworthy. Whereas all five are marvellously enriched, if the Bible is indeed God's word.

I wish I had longer and a way to enlarge on the immense importance of the vital question before us tonight. Secondly, vitally important as it is, it is almost entirely alien from the modern mood. Authority nowadays is a dirty word.

People dislike it and resent it. The scientific theory of relativity has been quite illegitimately applied to the realms of truth and righteousness. Now everything is relative to everything else.

There are no absolutes any longer were told, either of truth or of morality. There is nothing that has binding authority upon our minds or upon our lives. So if you are the kind of Christian, as I trust by the grace of God I am, who insists on affirming the supreme authority of the Bible, or maybe one should say better, the supreme authority of God through the Bible, then you will find yourself swimming against the stream.

So there are the two opening things. Our topic is very important and our topic is very unpopular. Now the text.

I would like to ask you to take the Bible in front of you and turn to the second Bible reading for tonight, the second letter of Paul to Timothy chapter 3. And before we come to my text that is really at the end of the chapter, I want to draw your attention to the context to which it belongs. I am sure all of us are learning, if we haven't learned already, that every text must be understood in its context. So Paul begins in chapter 3, understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress.

The men were beloveds of self, lovers of money, etc, etc, etc. Now three things about

these verses quickly. One, the last days are present and not future.

Paul is not writing about some distant future period. The last days, the whole of the New Testament teaches were inaugurated by Jesus. We are living in the last days.

That is very evident if you glance to verse 5 at the end of the verse, avoid such people. How could Timothy avoid these people if they began to live in future centuries? Paul is describing people who were alive then in the last days that began them. The first, the second, the chief characteristic of the last days is the enthronement of self in the place of God.

There is a characteristic of the days in which we live. There are 19 things that Paul uses here to describe the last days. The first is lovers of self and the last is rather than lovers of God.

That's it in a nutshell. People enthrone themselves having dethroned God. Now when your love is misdirected like that to yourself, instead of to God, there are fearful consequences.

People become boastful, proud, abusive, rebellious against all authority, etc. So the last days are today and the characteristic of the last days is self-centredness and rebellion against authority. Thirdly, this mood, this anti-authority mood of the last days infiltrates the church.

I don't doubt it infiltrates parts of our own church. Some people and segments within our own church family. It infiltrates the church.

It's very clear here again. You look again at verse 5, the people he is speaking about are people who are religious. They are holding the form of religion.

They go to church, but they deny its power. And so Paul goes on in verse 7 that these people are listening to anybody and never arriving at the truth. They lack stable convictions.

And in chapter 4, verse 3, he says they have a, they are suffering from a peculiar pathological condition called itching ears. They are accumulating teachers to themselves that suit their liking. Now there are many, many people like that in the contemporary church, even among church leaders who refuse to submit to the authority of God through Holy Scripture.

So the last days are today, their characteristic is rebellion and the rebellious mood penetrates into the church. But Paul goes on immediately as for you, Timothy, you are to be different. You are to resist the prevailing mood.

Verse 10 and verse 14 in the Greek text begin with exactly the same two little

monocilables, which should be translated, but as for you. Never mind in other words what's going on around you, Timothy. Never mind if the world invades the church.

Never mind if this mood is one of anti-authority but as for you. You are to stand your ground and be different. Now Timothy was a comparatively young man.

He was inexperienced. He had been called to responsibilities far beyond his capacity. And he was timid by temperament, shy and diffident.

But in spite of his youth and his inexperience and his timidity, he was to stand against the prevailing mood. Where are the timid timethies of today? In this congregation young men and women in danger of being swept off their feet by the flood tide of error and evil that has penetrated the church. Where do the timid timethies all stand their ground? Well listen to this word of God as it comes to you tonight that says, "But as for you," you are to be different.

God grant us men and women like that in this generation. We need them. Now Paul makes two affirmations about Scripture at the end of the chapter.

This is verse 16. 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.

But 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.

Any body 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 omits the little word 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 herless 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 the 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.

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 is 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. That is why Scripture is reliable because it is the word of God and God does not lie.

That's only the first thing. All Scripture is God breathed. There is a second.

Be. 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 that we call inspiration, God did not ask the human authors to take down some dictation as the Muslims believe that Allah said to Muhammad, dictating every word of the Quran in Arabic. No, on the 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. The Word of God through the words of men. You've been listening to the first part of a message by John Storz on why we can trust the Bible, which will be concluded at the same time next week.

This message from "To Timothy is vital for all Christians to understand." And there's much more on this subject in the commentary John Storz wrote entitled "The Message of To Timothy." It's part of the Bible speaks today commentary series of which there are more details on our website where you can also watch videos of John Storz preaching. Just visit premierchristinradio.com/JohnStorz. The legacy of John Storz 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 Storz who donated all his book royalties to support this ministry through Langham Partnership.

To find out about this and other ministries, John Storz founded, go to premier.org.uk/JohnStorz. Join us at the same time next week for more from "The Bible for Today" with John Storz.

[Music]

(buzzing)