

“I Believe in God, But Not the Bible”

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This is the day that the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad in it! Good morning, Church. I want to read a passage of Scripture this morning. I wonder what it's going to be about! 2 Timothy, chapter 3, beginning with verse 16, the Apostle Paul writing to his protege, Timothy: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the people of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” May God bless the reading of the Word.

Today we began a new series: “I believe in God, but...” And there are lots of qualifications out there, aren't there? There are lots of stipulations; there are lots of questions. We're going to address a lot of those questions and those stipulations head on. And with God's divine direction and inspiration, I hope that we will answer some of them. But I am quite certain that as we answer some of them, we are going to create many more, and I'm okay with that. You see, God put the Spirit of God within you to help you to wrestle with those questions. God has also given you a brain and He expects you to use it. And so, when we answer questions, sometimes the answers to those questions create more questions. That's the reason they call it “faith.” We believe, in spite of the qualifications, the exceptions, and the questions that we have. Now, I and Pastor Aaron and Pastor Pat all are going to be a part of this series. We promise you we are going to pray for divine leadership, guidance, and inspiration. We're going to bring all of our education and all of our experience to bear on these questions. We will do our very best, and I promise you, we're going to fail sometimes. We are not the Answer Guy. We are not always right. So, when we give you something, you think about it, you pray about it, you use the Spirit that God has put within you, you use the brain that God has granted you, and you wrestle with it, and you chew on it thoroughly before you swallow it. So, that is where we begin. Are you ready? “I believe in God, but not the Bible.”

Not that long ago, not that far away, I had just completed a very strenuous workout in the gym I belonged to at the time. I was dead-dog tired. I was dripping wet with sweat. And as I was leaving the gym, I almost ran over one of my ladies. Out of reflex she almost hugged me. She put her arms out and then went, “Ooh!” We both got a good laugh out of that. And she said, “Well, so this is your gym.” I said, “Yeah.” She said, “I'm looking for a gym. I am here to tour this gym. Is it a good gym?” And this was my answer: I said, “Yes, if you come.” You see, it doesn't matter what gym you belong to that you stay home from. Right? There are a lot of people who like the idea of belonging to a gym, but they don't ever go, and it doesn't do them much good. The Bible is kind of like that. People have a lot of strong opinions about the Bible. There are people who say, “I believe that the Bible is the infallible word of God,” and they have never opened one. And there are other people who say, “I believe that the Bible is a bunch of hooey,” and they have never opened one. Well, here's my opinion. If you haven't taken the Bible seriously, at least at some point in your life, you don't have the right to have an opinion about the Bible.

So, what is the Bible? I am not going to attempt to give you a thorough explanation of

what the Bible is. Pastor Aaron is starting a Bible class in a few weeks for four weeks. He'll answer those questions, I hope! No, he will answer those questions. This is not complete, but the word "Bible" comes from a Greek word that means "books," plural. The Bible is our book. But it is actually a library: a library of 66 books, written by many different authors with many different recipients. They had many different motivations for writing. There are many types of literature, from Wisdom Literature to an ancient Near Eastern love poem, all included in Scripture. They were written to diverse cultures, to diverse peoples, over more than a thousand years. And most of those books were written two thousand years ago or more. There are some people who believe that the Bible is purely of human origin, and there are some people who believe that the Bible is of purely divine origin. Most people fall somewhere in between.

Today we're going to look at how to view the Bible. How should we, as Christians, view the Bible? We're going to begin with the passage of Scripture I read to you just a moment ago: just two sentences of that entire book. But we're using those because they address Scripture. So, let's look at them. Let's begin by considering the book they are found in. The book of 2 Timothy is actually a personal letter. It is a personal letter written by the Apostle Paul to his protege, Timothy. The reason we call it 2 Timothy is because we have two letters that the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, and this is the second of those two. His motivation for writing these letters is he didn't know how much longer he was going to live. And Paul wanted to encourage and instruct his young protege, and so he wrote him these words. So, when you read 2 Timothy, you are reading somebody else's mail! I'm serious. You are reading somebody else's mail. This was intended to be a personal letter from Paul to Timothy. And that's what it was. Now, the part of this scripture that we're going to be dealing with is actually not all of it, just a part of it. The Apostle Paul says: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable..." All Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable. What did Paul mean when he said, "All Scripture"? When Paul wrote this passage, there was no such thing as the New Testament. So, when Paul says, "All Scripture," he was talking about his Scripture. His Scripture is what we call the Old Testament, the Old Covenant. It is the Jewish Scriptures. That is what Paul was referring to when he said, "All Scripture." Now, Jewish people of that day, as Jewish people of this day, do not hold all Scripture as being equally authoritative. Some of it was to be taken extremely seriously, and some of it was to be read casually. This would have been doubly true for the Apostle Paul, because he believed that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Covenant. He believed that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the law. He believed that we are no longer under the Old Covenant but under the New Covenant, not under law but under grace. But he says: "All Scripture is God-breathed and all of it is profitable..." Now, when we read 2 Timothy, we view that as Scripture. The Apostle Paul would have been appalled! (Apostle Paul appalled. That's good!) The Apostle Paul would have been appalled that you and I saw a personal letter he wrote as equal to what he viewed as Scripture. Nevertheless, that's where we're at, and that's what we do.

All Scripture, Paul says, is God-breathed. And this is good. Now, I admit I'm a Bible nerd, but this kind of stuff right here is the stuff that I love. All Scripture is God-breathed. Now listen closely. This is a compound word in Greek. It's one word. God-breathed is one word in Greek and it literally means God-Spirited. In other words, the Spirit of God

is in this. In some way, in some fashion, the Spirit of God is in all Scripture. The Spirit of God is in all Scripture. Now, here's the nerdy part. Before this moment in history, this word didn't exist. It never occurred in any Greek writing. It never occurs again anywhere in the New Testament. The only time it is used in any writings whatsoever is when the early church fathers used this word in description of 2 Timothy. In other words, Paul made this word up! This was his creation. This is Paul's word. I'm going back several months to when Pastor Aaron used the word "gooder." This was Paul's word. He made it up just for this passage. He wanted to say that God inspired all Scripture at some level. God's Word, all of Scripture, is inspired and is profitable. Better stated: It can be profitable. It can be profitable. It's not profitable if you don't use it. It's not profitable if you don't study it. It's not profitable if you don't make it your own. It's just words in a book if you don't apply it. It's profitable if it's understood, and it takes exercise to understand. It takes effort to understand, much like getting benefit out of a gym. It takes effort. All Scripture is God-inspired and is profitable if you apply it. The Spirit of God gives life to the words on the page. Let me say that again. The Spirit of God gives life to the words on the page. It makes them come alive. The word becomes profitable to us when it becomes a part of us. If it's not a part of us, it's not profitable to us.

So, all Scripture is divinely inspired and is profitable to us if we make it a part of us. So, let us ask this question: Is the Bible inspired? Is the Bible inspired? I don't see how anybody can read how the Scriptures came to be, can study how the scriptures came about, can find out how we have what we have today, and not see God's hand all over it. Is the Bible inspired? In a word, yes. The Bible is the inspired Word of God. But what does it mean when we say inspired? Did I say we were going to create some questions? What do we mean when we say the Bible is inspired? I began today by telling you that Pastor Pat and Pastor Aaron and I are going to seek divine guidance and divine inspiration in what we give to you. We believe and we trust that God is going to inspire us, and going to lead us, and going to give us what you and we need. That's inspiration. But what do we mean when we say the Bible is inspired? Do we mean that the Bible is inspired as we hope to be inspired, or do we mean that God was whispering in the ear of the Apostle Paul and giving him every word that he wrote to young Timothy? What do we mean when we say inspired? We believe that human beings were divinely inspired and wrote what we call the Bible. Now, I'm going to cheat a little bit. I am going to let you wrestle with the degree of inspiration. I'm not going to define that for you. I am going to let you wrestle with the degree of divine inspiration. Now, why don't we think that modern writers were as inspired as those writers of the past? It's not the degree of inspiration; it's the proximity to Jesus. The writers of Scripture knew Jesus personally or they knew people who knew him personally. The authoritative part of that comes from their firsthand knowledge of Jesus Christ, not like us looking back from two thousand years. The Spirit of God infuses the words with life. And if you are a student of Scripture, you have experienced this, I promise you. You have read the same passage and gotten something different out of it at different times. That's what the Spirit of God does. The Spirit of God takes the words in the Bible and makes them "the Word" for us, giving us what we need when we need it. That is divine inspiration. That's why we call it the living Word of God. So, is the Bible inspired? Yes!

Is the Bible the Word of God? The Spirit of God infuses the words and they become the Word for us. As I read the Word of God, I find that: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The infallible, immutable, and perfect Word of God is Jesus Christ. He is the Word of God. When God wanted a perfect description of Himself, He did not have some dude write something in a book. He sent Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the perfect and infallible Word of God. When the New Testament speaks of the "Word of God," it is always speaking of the Gospel of and about Jesus. The Bible is the Word of God. The Spirit of God infuses the words on the page and makes them the Word of God for us. In short, the Bible is our book. The Bible is inspired. The Bible contains the Word of God. The Spirit of God causes the Bible to speak to us and the words become the Word for us. I intentionally did not define for you the level of inspiration. I want you to wrestle with that. But no matter what level of inspiration you believe, the Spirit can only change you if the Bible becomes part of you. The Bible can only have an effect on you if you use it, if you study it, if you take it seriously.

The Bible is somewhat like Communion. The reason I'm smiling to myself is this is not my illustration. I stole it. This is somebody else's. Did you know that all pastors are thieves? We use each other's stuff. And this is not mine. This is not mine. This I got from the Reverend Adam Hamilton. He says the Bible is like Communion. When we gather around Christ's table, we have some idea of how the bread and the juice came to be. We know that they are simple elements. They started at a farm somewhere. But when we share them together, God is, in a very special way, present with us. God is there, and God changes lives at the table. And the same thing is true with the Bible, with the Scriptures. The Spirit of God infuses the words and causes them to be for us the Word that touches us, that changes us, that imparts power to us. But it has no effect if it doesn't become part of you.

The Bible is our book. Study it. Use it. Learn about it. Ingest it. Make it a part of you, and it will transform you. Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, a light unto my path. And I will hide its words in my heart that I may not sin against You, O Lord. Let us pray.

Lord, we are eternally grateful for the Scriptures. May they become part of us; may they become one with us; may we be transformed and moved and shaped into the image of the true and the perfect and the infallible Word of God in Jesus Christ. In Thy name we pray. Amen.