

VIII. Thinking Biblically.

16All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17that the man of Godmay be complete, equipped for every good work. *– 2 Timothy 3:16-17*

From all we have looked at so far in this study, hopefully you understand better the effect that sin has had on the human mind. In a very real and deep sense, sin has seared our minds so that we are absolutely incapable of correctly interpreting the truth about God, ourselves, the world, and our circumstances. It is only through the illuminating work of God in our hearts that we are able to see clearly and adjust our thinking to be more like His. Consider the words of God, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isa. 55:8). In this statement, God isn't saying that His thoughts transcend ours. This is a rebuke for Israel to get their thoughts and ways in line with God's.

The problem with human thinking in general is that people don't recognize this inability to interpret truth. They are oblivious to it. The way they think and make decisions evinces that they think their minds are just fine. Certainly they are able to think logically and to reason. The unbelieving mind as well as the believing mind can learn language, math, and the sciences. A healthy mind is not handicapped in that regard, but there is still a spiritual inability with the unbelieving mind to see truth clearly the way God intends.

For instance, consider the laws of math and science. Most would agree that these laws are objective and universal. Because of their unchanging nature, most people see these laws as the logical base for determining any truth. David Hume argued, "A wise man proportions his belief to the evidence." If something can be proven through scientific means, presenting credible evidence and demonstrable causality, then it should be accepted as true. Generally speaking, this makes sense, but the believing mind understands that it does not go far enough. While the laws of math and science (or logic and reason) are helpful, they are helpful ultimately because God has determined them. These laws hold true because the God of creation made the universe with a sense of order.

All of these laws, then, point back to God as the ultimate determiner and provider of truth. Human thinking places man at the forefront as the ultimate judge of right and wrong. Apply the laws, they reason, and you will be able to come to the right conclusions. But the redeemed mind understands that man is not ultimate, God is. All these truths point back to the Creator and reflect His glory. Ultimately, God is the judge of what is right and wrong, and man remains dependent upon God's revelation to understand the truth rightly. The unbelieving mind is unwilling to go this far.

This is why man needs God to "turn on the lights." We are blinded by our sin, but God shines the truth in our hearts. This inability is corrected at salvation when the believer is restored and his eyes are opened to see things God's way. But God doesn't simply implant this knowledge in the human mind. It is derived from His revelation. God has given us His inspired, infallible, inerrant Word to teach us His truth.

Richard Pratt: "As the restored image of God, redeemed man seeks to do justice to God's revelation in all of creation and in Scripture. He realizes that it is not enough to know that rain is the condensation of evaporated water. He asks *what* rain is and how it reveals the character and will of God. If there were no sin, this would be no problem. Man could simply observe the world and know God through it. Yet, because of sin 'it is needful that another and better help be added to direct us aught to the very Creator of the universe' [John Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 6, 1]. That better help is Scripture. The Christian is committed to searching the Scriptures for the truths leading to the knowledge of salvation and also those truths leading to the knowledge of creation as it reveals God and His will to man. This is not to say that the Bible becomes a textbook of natural science, as if the Christian did not need to look at the world and could merely read his Bible and arrive at scientific truth. Instead, the Scriptures lay down general principles on which every investigation of the world must rest. The true knowledge of rain, for instance, reveals to us the mercy of God and how God expects us to treat enemies with kindness (Matt. 5:45ff). Of course, scientific investigation into the nature of rain will intensify and clarify the Christian's understanding of these things but true knowledge of rain is discovered by investigation resting on and governed by the Scriptures. As a restored creature, the Christian seeks to maintain the Creator-creature distinction in his knowledge and morality and thereby gives proper place to the revelation of God."[[1]](#footnote-1)

Unbelievers don't believe that their thinking is impaired by sin. They live as though they are able to make right choices independently of God. Sadly, many believers do the same thing. In practice, instead of leaning on the principles of God's revelation, they formulate opinions and make decisions according to their own understanding and reasoning. Consider these motivations for personal belief:

1) Previous Education – a person has always been taught that a certain thing is right. They may choose not to think against it because of their trust in previous education. ("My mom always taught me to treat others respectfully and without prejudice, and so I try to do that to the best of my ability.")

2) Popular Opinion – a person believes something to be right because the general public agrees on an opinion. ("I think most people would agree that abortion is unfortunate but necessary.")

3) Personal Feeling – a person may have a strong conviction because in their heart they know it to be right ("I really believe in my heart that if two people truly love each other, they have a fundamental right to marry.").

4) Pragmatic Effect – a person holds an opinion or makes a decision based on the results it produces. ("I don't care what you say about medicinal marijuana because my uncle uses it and it has seriously helped him recover.")

1. Considering these different motivations for personal belief, give at least one specific example of how someone might make a decision based upon:

a. Previous Education:

b. Popular Opinion:

c. Personal Feeling:

d. Pragmatic Effect:

2. Consider a very normal and practical contemporary issue like reading.

a. How would unbelieving parents generally motivate their children to read? Why is it necessary? What is the purpose of reading and what is its goal?

b. How does this differ from the way a Christian ought to think about reading? Why is it necessary? What is its purpose or goal?

3. Consider God's words in 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

16All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17that the man of Godmay be complete, equipped for every good work.

The phrase "breathed out by God" is where we derive the idea of the inspiration of Scripture. Inspiration means that the ultimate source of the Bible is God so that the words of Scripture are the words of God and not the words of men. Why is it significant that Scripture is "breathed out by God"?

The Scriptural Support for Inspiration from 2 Timothy 3:16-17

There are four key terms in this verse that are essential to understanding the passage correctly:

1. All (Gr. pasa).

a. This word could be translated “all” or “every.” The context determines the better reading.

b. Norman Geisler: “[The Greek word pasa] can be translated ‘every’ or ‘all.’ It is not essential that one term is better than the other because both refer to the entire canon of the Old Testament, which Timothy had known from his youth (v. 15).”[[2]](#footnote-2)

2. Scripture (Gr. graphe).

a. This term could refer to 1) any writing in general since graphe is typically a generic term for any writing. 2) It could refer to the writing of the Old Testament only since that is what Paul seems to have had in mind in v. 15. 3) It could refer to the entire canon of Scripture including the Books of the Bible that had not yet been written.

b. The Greek word graphe includes any writing that would be considered sacred Scripture. Whenever the term is used in the New Testament, it always is referring to sacred Scripture.[[3]](#footnote-3)

c. In 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul refers to Luke 10:7 as graphe. And in 2 Peter 3:16, Peter refers to Paul’s writings as graphe. Romans 15:4 makes it clear that graphe refers to Holy Scripture.

3. Breathed out by God (Gr. theopneustos).

a. The interpretive question is whether “God-breathed” should be understood as predicative or attributive. Is Paul saying “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable . . . ” (predicative) or “Every Scripture breathed out by God is profitable . . .” (attributive)?

b. The predicative option indicates that the whole of Scripture is inspired. The attributive option leaves the possibility that some Scriptures might not be inspired.

c. The predicative reading is best because “breathed out by God” and “profitable” are both adjectives conjoined by the conjunction “and.” This being the case, it is more natural to see them in the same manner modifying “Scripture.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

d. It does not seem likely that Paul would separate some Scripture as God-breathed and others as not (cf. 2 Tim. 3:15).

e. Notice that the Scripture is breathed out by God and not breathed into. It is not that God took a collection of writings and inspired them. He breathed out the Scriptures (cf. Matt. 4:4).

B. B. Warfield: “The Greek term has . . . nothing to say of inspiring or of inspiration: it only speaks of a ‘spiring’ or ‘spiration.’ What it says of Scripture is, not that it is ‘breathed into by God’ or is the product of the Divine ‘inbreathing’ into its human authors, but that it is breathed out by God, ‘God-breathed,’ the product of the creative breath of God.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

4. Profitable (Gr. ōphelimos).

a. Are the Scriptures inspired because they are profitable or are the Scriptures profitable because they are inspired?

b. Since “God-breathed” is best understood as predicative so “profitable” should also be understood that way because of the conjunction “and.”

4. Consider God's words in 2 Peter 1:20-21:

20knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

a. What does this passage clearly teach about the source of God's Word?

b. This passage speaks about men who wrote God's Word as they were "carried along by the Holy Spirit." Acts 27:15 uses the same Greek word to describe wind driving a sail. How does this picture help us understand how God inspired the Scriptures?

5. The idea of inspiration is related to the sufficiency of Scripture. Since Scripture is literally God-breathed, it is what allows the man of God to be adequate or competent and fully equipped for every good work. The sufficiency of Scripture means that a person can find everything he needs to live for God's glory in the Bible.

a. How does 2 Timothy 3:16-17 speaks about the sufficiency of God's Word?

b. How does 2 Peter 1:3 help explain the sufficiency of Scripture?

c. How does Psalm 19:7-11 also speak to the sufficiency of Scripture?

6. If God the Father is the God of truth (Isa. 65:16), and Jesus Christ is the truth (John 14:6), and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (John 15:26; 1 John 4:6), what can we conclude about the Bible (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 2:15; Ps. 119:160)?

**"Standing on the Promises"**

Standing on the promises of Christ my King,

Thro' eternal ages let His praises ring;

Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing,

Standing on the promises of God.

*Standing, standing, standing on the promises of God my Savior;*

*Standing, standing, I'm standing on the promises of God.*

Standing on the promises that cannot fail,

When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,

By the living Word of God I shall prevail,

Standing on the promises of God.

Standing on the promises of Christ the Lord,

Bound to Him eternally by love's strong cord,

Overcoming daily with the Spirit's sword,

Standing on the promises of God.

Standing on the promises I cannot fall,

List'ning every moment to the Spirit's call,

Resting in the Savior as my all in all,

Standing on the promises of God.

Thoughts for Application:

1. Can you think of examples of how you have either held an opinion or made a decision based on previous education, popular opinion, personal feeling, or pragmatic effect? Try to think of at least three examples.

2. How could you think through these three examples differently by applying the truths and principles from Scripture (even if you might come to the same conclusions)?

3. Why is the Bible trustworthy? How does an understanding of the inspiration of Scripture give you greater confidence in God's Word?

4. Are we dependent on any other source or authority to help us live the Christian walk? What does the Bible teach concerning its own sufficiency?

5. In light of this lesson, what practical steps can you take to ensure you are in the Word of God more? How can you grow in your understanding of the truth so that you can more faithfully live out its commands and principles?

1. Pratt, *Every Thought Captive*, 40-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, rev. and exp. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Paul Feinberg writes, “The word *graphe* is found over fifty times in the New Testament and always means one thing – the sacred writings. Some have concluded that it has become a kind of *terminus technicus* for the sacred writings” (Paul Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler [Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1980], 277). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Geisler and Nix, *General Introduction*, 35, for a fuller explanation of why the predicative use is the preferred view. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. B. B. Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield, eds. Ethelbert D. Warfield, William Park Armstrong, and Caspar Wistar Hodge (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1932), 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)