

NazaRemix Series — Just What IS a Nazarene? We Are Bible-Based

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Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)

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Background Notes

Key Scripture Texts: 2 Timothy 3:10-17; also, 2 Timothy 3:1-5 and Psalm 119:105, 89-93, 97-98, 103-14, 114, 130.

Introduction

The turn of the 20th century was a stormy period in human history. Faced by the first of two world wars, human beings began to re-think some dearly held views of human nature and human progress. Optimism succumbed to despair as the most powerful weapons ever invented wiped millions of people off the face of the earth. Sadly, the nations who first took up arms belonged to so-called Christian Europe. A deep disappointment fell over the minds of sincere theologians who had bought into the belief that the world was getting better and better, thanks to the social benefits of Christianity within civilization.

One man, Karl Barth, was just such a theologian. Like many of his contemporaries he had, for a time, read the Bible in such a way as to conclude that humanism was correct — that forward movement was inevitable, as the church shared in the task of bringing about the kingdom of God on earth. World War I was his wake-up call, and suddenly human nature appeared depraved and fallen in ways too-easily concealed by the sort of theology he had been taught as a young man in universities dominated by Enlightenment thinking. Reason, perfectible humanity, and social progress — these were the values which drove the thinking of Enlightenment Christians until the dark days of 1914 fell all over Europe in ways that remind us of the shock surrounding 9/11.

Faced with the unmistakable fallacy of this naïve view of history, Barth turned to the Bible for a fresh reading. The work which flowed from his lecture halls and his pen began at this new fountainhead. Writing in 1916, two years into the WWI, Barth said:

We are to attempt an answer to the questions, "What is there within the Bible? What sort of house is it to which the Bible is the door? What sort of country is spread before our eyes when we throw the Bible open?" [Karl Barth, *The Strange New World Within the Bible*, originally from a series of essays in 1916, later republished in 1958 with its new title].

Read without the prejudice of secular ideas and self-centered motives, the Bible opened up for Barth a God-shaped perspective for looking at the world. At a time when tyrants sought to impose their iron-fisted wills and absolute *authority* over the nations of the world, the Bible revealed God's *authority*. And it didn't look anything like the marauding military machines deployed by the Kaiser. When God addressed human beings within the pages of the Bible, He did so by telling the grand and mighty story of Creation, Fall, Redemption, Call, Exile, Return and Messiah. Rather than seeing the Bible as a collection of ideas suited to defend favorite doctrines or to set up rigid rules of conduct, honest students of the Bible began to experience the telling of God's *big narrative* which brought a new kind of authority, one which was truly a kingdom coming to earth and shaping the lives of human beings in the image of God Himself.

They called Barth *neo-Orthodox* because he seemed to be advocating a return to some form of *orthodoxy* — that is, "right thinking" based on a new appreciation for God, Christ and the Bible. Barth talked about the importance of "the Word of God" *rightly understood*. Not everybody agreed with him. The left-wing of the Christian movement thought he was becoming a reactionary, falling back into pre-critical ways of thinking about the Bible. Those on the right didn't think he went far enough and questioned whether he really believed that the Bible *is the Word of God*, but instead only *contained it*. All the battles swirling around Barth aside, we can minimally agree that when history faced a *crisis of authority*, the clear road to recovery passed directly

through the pages of sacred Scripture. What Barth and many others did was to call the people of God back to a serious and thoughtful reading of the Bible, seeing in its words the authority of God exercised over His world in truthful and loving ways.

The history of the Nazarene movement also passed through those critical times. When some of the main Christian denominations began to treat the Bible as optional or to interpret its message so as to water-down God's authority, groups of faithful Christ-followers refused to compromise. The Nazarene movement recognized the centrality of the Bible and its importance in shaping Christian mission in a hurting world. Without the Bible, they argued, we have no clear blueprint for preaching the Gospel; without the Bible, we have no direct witness to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Holding to the authority of the Bible was not just a matter of maintaining purity in doctrine or waging war against all opposing viewpoints. The Bible was God's proclamation to "the ends of the earth," calling into existence His holy people from among the nations. There was no dichotomy between the Bible and higher education for the early Nazarenes. As the Point Loma Nazarene University website recalls, founder Phineas Bresee, early on in 1902, responded to the need for a *Bible* college in Los Angeles, and formed the Pacific *Bible* College which eventually became (1973) Point Loma Nazarene University, the first of several such educational centers throughout the world. The website adds this relevant statement:

There is a Bible on campus, encased in protective glass. This Bible belonged to Phineas Bresee. It's opened to Isaiah 62, the chapter Bresee claimed for the school. Permanently marked with his fingerprints, it displays a double message: God's words in Isaiah 62 and Bresee's love for those words. It's a message of being grounded in Scripture, of pursuing a well-rounded education and serving the poor out of a first and intense love for God and His Word. Bresee died in 1915, but his message still resonates.¹

Indeed it does. But unlike that Bible "encased in protective glass," the word of God expressed through it bursts the protective boundaries we might want to place around it, and issues forth with authority and power, the message of life and hope — the message of the Gospel. The choice of Isaiah 62 is most fitting, for it begins with the wonderful words, "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet." As Francis Schaeffer noted in a book title some years ago, *He Is There and He is Not Silent*. Isaiah goes on to alert his audience that the effect of God's word is that "the nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory" and by the "mouth of the LORD" God's people will also receive a "new name" (62:2). Because of this word from God, His people are posted as "watchmen" who themselves "*will never be silent day or night*" (62:6). Through them, "The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth" (62:11a) with the wonderful words of the Gospel, "See, your Savior comes!" (62:11b).

Bresee's choice of a text was highly appropriate. The Bible is God's special medium for issuing His royal proclamations to the world. God exercises His authority through the Bible. The earliest accounts found in its own pages reveal the God who made covenants with human beings. In the ancient world, no such covenants were concluded without some written form to document them. We have evidence of this in Deuteronomy 27:2-3 with the command to "write on tablets all the words" God spoke to Moses and set them up in the land of Canaan for all to see and read. Written documents provided the visible sign of God's authority over His people. As Lord of the covenant and king in His kingdom, Yahweh God gave His word to His people.

During this first study in the *NazaRemix* series, we focus attention on the place of the Bible in the life of the church. Our primary Scripture will be Paul's instruction to the churches as addressed to his young protégé, Timothy, in his second letter to him, 2 Timothy 3:10-17. We will then suggest the ways Paul used this teaching about the Bible to anchor new Christians who faced a time of decline in their world, a period referred to with the stock phrase "last days." Paul and Timothy lived through such "last days," as has the Christian church many

¹ From the Point Loma website: http://www.pointloma.edu/About_PLNU/History.htm. Readers of our *Notes* are encouraged to carefully read Isaiah 62 in its entirety, for it beautifully weaves the themes of *God not being silent in His word with the mission of His people to the world*.

times during the past nearly two thousand years. Then, in a final section, we will celebrate the Bible's message using the powerful language of Psalm 119, choosing selected verses with particular relevance to this theme.

Authority: In a Book or in a Person?

Islam claims close to 1.8 billion followers. And Islam claims final authority from a book called the *Qur'an*. Some 15 million persons are Jews and their faith also looks to a book for authority: the *Tenak*, with *Torah* its first and primary volume. Slightly more than 2 billion people call themselves Christians, many of whom accept the authority found in the Bible, consisting of Old and New Testaments. Other world religions have *holy books* which, to a greater or less extent, exercise authority in the lives of their followers. But can a book, by itself, have authority?

That question has fueled interminable debates — some of them styled as *The Battle for the Bible*. Of course, battles often become necessary when an enemy threatens to destroy unjustly. However, other battles are waged before both sides sit down and hear each other out. In the 1970's, Christians fought such battles about the meaning of the Bible's authority. Using words like "inerrancy," "plenary inspiration," and "infallibility," both sides attempted to outdo each other with scholarly rhetoric and carefully worded arguments. Remarkably, most of the combatants felt deeply that God had in fact spoken to us through His Word, but disagreed about exactly how that took form when words, through stone and etchings or parchment and ink, flowed onto written surfaces so that people could read them. Was the Bible: God's Word? A human word about God? God's Word through human writers? The stakes in this conversation are high. After all, if the Bible really is God's Word to human beings, getting our thinking about it straight becomes crucial.

The problem seems to arise from the way we understand authority and the Bible. In the first place, all authority originates with God Himself, as Paul explained it in Romans 13:1. Jesus reaffirmed this when reacting to Pilate's cynical presumption that he (and the Roman Empire) held all the power: "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above" (John 19:11a). Before he ascended to heaven, he also said "All authority is given to me in heaven and on earth" in Matthew 28:18. In each case, the New Testament uses the Greek word *exousia* when referring to the idea of "power" or "authority." The word itself is comprised of the preposition *ex* and the verbal form *ousia* which means "being." To have authority in this sense means having "the *source (ek) of being (ousia)*." All things take their origin from God, and the New Testament expands that understanding to include God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit — the authority of the Triune God.

When we come to the Bible, we are dealing with a *derived* authority, one which flows from God. More primary than the *written word of God* is *God Himself*. However, as John's Gospel is quick to underscore:

In the beginning was the Word (*logos*), and the Word (*logos*) was with God, and the Word (*logos*) was God (John 1:1).

This "word" is above all the "word which became flesh" (John 1:14). Similarly, the writer to the Hebrews tells us about God speaking "to the fathers by the prophets" at one time in human history, but then, at a later time, "speaking to us by His Son..." (Hebrews 1:1-2). How do we know this? What is the *witness* which *points to the Word-become-flesh*? The answer is, of course, the Bible. But the Bible doesn't draw attention to itself but to the God — the triune God — who speaks the words which the Bible incorporates in its written message. The *written word* derives its authority from *the living word*.

In saying this, we are not diminishing the authority of the Bible, but instead, we are properly locating it squarely within the authority of the God who speaks His Word to us. The problem created by some of Jesus' contemporaries — specifically the rabbinic schools of Second Temple Judaism — was the confusing of a *book* with the *person of God Himself*. Granted, the rabbis knew full well the difference between *the scrolls* stored in an ark at the front of their synagogues and the *word* which dynamically came from the mouth of God. Did not their own Torah contain the famous saying, later quoted by Jesus to the devil? "...man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deuteronomy 8:3; also, Matthew 4:4 and Luke 4:4). The "word" *comes from the mouth* of Yahweh! It is a living word already because it is, in

fact, spoken by God Himself in real space-and-time to real people living in space-and-time. In no sense, is that word *locked inside a book*. But people can do and say things which suggest that it is, in fact, somehow frozen solid inside the pages of such a book. When Jesus conversed with the Jewish leaders of his own day, he often found them rigid, woodenly literally, and sadly lifeless in their use of Scripture. Consider this passage:

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life (John 5:39-40).

For people to "search the Scriptures" is a fine and noble activity. Many of the Jewish people made a profession out of reading, studying, explaining and writing about their Scriptures. The word "search," expressed in Greek by the term *eraunaō*, likely derives from the Hebrew verb *dārash*, the root for the specialized interpretation of Jewish Scripture known as *midrash*. Literally, Jesus is saying, "You engage in *midrash*, producing elaborate interpretations of the Scripture..." In itself, that's a wonderful vocation: to explain the Bible so others can understand it. But the problem results from supposing that *the process of Scripture study and the traditional interpretations coming from that study* somehow — in Jesus' words — give people "eternal life."

What Jesus warns the Jewish scholars to avoid is turning the Scriptures into the *source of authority* whereby someone might experience the life of God Himself. Instead, he reminds them, the purpose of Scripture is to "bear witness" to Jesus himself. Rather than being the medium through which people might come to see who Jesus is and what he has come to do, Scripture became the destination — the goal. Put simply, Scripture-in-itself is not the way of salvation: God-revealed-in-Jesus is the way of salvation. The role of Scripture is to *bear witness* to the truth that God has become flesh in Jesus, the one who has come to give us eternal life.

It is possible to lock God in a book, or to make the book out to be the source of eternal life. Not so, Jesus warns his contemporaries. "Come to me," he tells them, "that you may have life." Therefore, in the last analysis, authority is vested, not in a book, but in a person — a person to whom the book bears faithful witness. Perhaps Tom Wright gives us the best encapsulated summary of this when he writes:

When we take the phrase "the authority of scripture" out of its suitcase, then, we recognize that it can have Christian meaning only if we are referring to scripture's authority *in a delegated or mediated sense* from that which God himself possesses and that which Jesus possesses as the risen Lord and Son of God, the Immanuel. It must mean, if it means anything Christian, "the authority of God *exercised through* scripture." The question then becomes: What might we mean by the authority of God, or of Jesus? What role does scripture have *within that*? Where does the Spirit come into the picture? And, not least, how does this "authority" actually *work*? How does it relate, if at all, to the "authority" of leaders or office-bearers in the church?²

The Bible tells the story of God, and we must listen to what He says. While, like the Pharisees in Jesus' day, it might be tempting to use the Bible as a source of "proof-texts" in support of this or that doctrine, we should instead press beyond this limited view of Scripture and enter into *conversation* with the God who speaks to us through it.

The Bible and The People of God: Old and New

Open your Bible to the table of contents, and you will immediately see two main sections: "Old Testament" and "New Testament." Behind that word "testament" lies the idea of "covenant," the means by which God establishes His people *as His people*. Covenants were solemn agreements, originating in the ancient form of the *treaty* made by a great king with his subject peoples. In this *covenant* the king would identify himself, explain what he has done for the benefit of his people, tell his people their responsibilities, alert them to both the blessings and the punishments for either obeying or breaking the rules, and then making two identical written copies of his agreement: one for himself and the other for them. Whatever authority that written document had, it was derived from the king who made the covenant. Ancient treaties required written forms to guarantee the

² N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture*, Harper, 2005, p. 25. In this little 146 page book, Bishop Wright offers a thoughtful, carefully written study of this complex issue. This is an excellent way to make sense out of a truly thorny debate which has divided the Christian community. I will include additional insights from Wright's book throughout this study.

clarity and witness of the covenant. In so many words, the covenant-as-written created and shaped the life of the king's people *in his image*. On an annual basis, the king would summon the people and read the covenant document to his people, making sure they knew his will and purposes. That is, so that they might keep current with his word — his living word to them.

In a similar way, the Old Testament people of God lived under the rule of Yahweh their God and King. His covenant with them had been given in stages: through Abraham and Moses. First, he spoke to His covenant *family*, and then He brought into existence His covenant *nation*. The written form of this covenant, starting with *Genesis*, gave order to Israel's life as a nation: worship, wisdom, correction, instruction, and promise. By hearing the words of God *read*, Israel stood in the presence of the living God. The Hebrew Scripture also contained the *response of Israel* to her covenant God in the form of "praise, lament, adoration, perplexity, despair, hope, and commitment."³

We also discover in the Old Testament the idea of "the word of God (Yahweh)" as something spoken by God to His people. Ordinarily, words arise on the lips of the speaker, made audible by *breath* passing vocal chords, across the tongue and through the lips. There is something quite physical, something embodied about speech. This is sometimes called the "speech act," because it involves the encoding of ideas in a physical event — namely "speaking." Usually the spoken word of God arrives by something called *inspiration*, and since *breath* is involved, inevitably this involves the Spirit of God, the metaphorical equivalent of God's breath. This too involves the Scriptures, since the Spirit guides biblical writers to produce books for the people of God. Those writings contain the words which God wanted His people to have. Sometimes this is called *verbal inspiration* because it involves the Spirit overseeing the speech acts of human beings in such a way as to insure that what they wrote was what God wanted written. None of this excludes the role of human language, personality, styles of writing, use of literary forms (poetry, prose, parable, etc.), and the like in producing written documents.

But this process includes God's Word as the source and authority for what is finally written down. Several Hebrew texts illustrate this for us:

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host (Psalm 33:6).
Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? (Jeremiah 23:29).
The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever (Isaiah 40:8).
For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11).

But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it (Deuteronomy 30:14).
Commenting on Psalm 33:6, Walter Brueggeman writes: "The imagery is of a powerful sovereign who utters a decree from the throne, issues a fiat, and in the very utterance the thing is done."⁴

The Old Testament people of God became accustomed to *hearing God* through the Scriptures where they might find His "call, promise, liberation, guidance, judgment, forgiveness, further judgment, renewed liberation and renewed promise."⁵ Scripture for them was not just a *record* of their own dealings with God, but something much more definitely coming from God Himself. God spoke and Israel heard Him. Furthermore, God's word was not the mere imparting of information, as if God was having a routine review session when He told the old story of what happened to Israel at the Exodus! By telling so many stories about what happened to Israel, God was re-directing their story as His word, shaping and re-creating them in each successive generation to be His holy people, reflecting His glory back into the world. This, too, belongs to what is meant for Scripture to *be the word of God*.

³ Wright, *Ibid*, p. 37.

⁴ *Theology of the Old Testament*, Eerdmans, 1997, p. 146.

⁵ Wright, *Ibid*, p. 39.

By the time we arrive at the New Testament, Israel's story has taken a sharp new turn. Thanks to the Old Testament prophets, God's people have been guided into exile and back to their land, but filled with puzzlement that in a real sense the exile had not come to an end. They awaited a fresh word from God. Isaiah the prophet had left Israel with a haunting but hopeful sign of things to come when he wrote about "a voice crying in the wilderness..." (Isaiah 40). Indeed, a voice would speak — first through the last of the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptizer, and then through God's Son (compare Hebrews 1:1-2).

To put it concisely, Jesus *fulfilled* (accomplished) all the Scripture foreshadowed. The story of Israel *became Jesus' story*, as "the word became flesh and pitched his tent among us" (John 1:14). The New Testament wrote repeatedly about God's Scriptures being fulfilled by what Jesus said and did. We are tempted to interpret this as some sort of crystal-ball gazing followed by a shocking fulfillment. But biblical prophecy doesn't work that way. When Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament, he didn't just satisfy a prediction here or there, an isolated oracle which happened to turn out as the diviner said it would. Sometimes we see lists of fulfilled prophecies written down and are told to look with amazement at how many different "prophecies" Jesus fulfilled. The point of fulfilled prophecy is not to stagger the statistician's odds. Rather, we must examine the *whole history of Israel*, complete with her prophets, sages, historians, poets and kings — each under the influence of the word of God and the Spirit of God, directing them to tell the story of Israel in such a way as to prepare the way for the One who would bring that story to its grand and glorious climax. Jesus is the climax — and thus the fulfillment — of God's big story told *to* and *through* Israel. In that sense, *Jesus is the word of God fulfilled*.

Important New Testament texts bear this out. We might say that one large purpose of writing the New Testament was to make the correlations between God's Old Testament purposes and their achievement in the person of Jesus, God's Son. He came not to destroy Torah but fulfill it (Matthew 5:17-18). Jesus made clear that scripture *needed to be fulfilled* (Mark 14:49). After his resurrection, when the important events of Good Friday and Easter had reached their goal, Jesus explained to his followers how "Moses, the prophets and all the scriptures" pointed to him (Luke 24:27, 44-45).

All of which was consistent with how Jesus handled Scripture in his own ministry. Seeing how badly the Jewish scholars around him read the Bible, he declared that they did not know *the Scriptures* nor *the power of God* (Matthew 22:29), and presumably these two things belonged together! Jesus certainly kept them together in his own handling of the Bible. *Tradition* was a dirty word in Jesus' teaching, not because there aren't *good* traditions, but because tradition can replace the Bible as the word of God. Jesus thought it had done so in the minds of his contemporaries (Matthew 15:6-9). "Scripture cannot be broken," Jesus chided those who challenged his use of it (John 10:35). And all the way to the cross, Jesus placed confidence in the word of God reaching its fulfillment as he uttered those final, momentous words: "It is finished!" He certainly meant, "It is fulfilled!" and had in mind the word of God in its living, written, shaping, and dynamic form.

None of this was lost on the early apostles, newly snatched from the jaws of death into the resurrection life of Jesus and filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Scripture had been fulfilled in wonderful though unexpected ways. Given time to reflect on "*all* that the prophets had spoken," the followers of Jesus, especially Peter, gave powerful expression to God's Word. A casual reading of Acts 2, for example, reveals the importance of "speech" and "words" in the life of the restored people of God. There we read about "hearing in our own languages the wonderful works of God." Scripture took shape in the life of the early church when the Holy Spirit gifted the Twelve to speak as they did. True, that word initially took an *oral form*, but thanks to the work of Luke, was written down in the book of *Acts*. Similar speech acts assumed a written form during the course of the first century, as various writers, chosen by God and gifted by the Spirit, consciously wrote as they were guided by the Holy Spirit.

Much of what Peter said on Pentecost was about how the words Old Testament prophets took on new meaning in the person and work of Jesus. Even the event of Pentecost itself had been foreshadowing by Joel (Acts 2:16-

21), as Peter introduces his remarks with the formula, "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel..." Notice how Peter connects the speech act of Joel with the fulfilled word of God in what actually happened on Pentecost. He also draws a line between the resurrection of Jesus and Psalm 16:8-11 and 110:1. Luke refers to what Peter said by writing, "With *many other words* he warned them..." The foundational circumstances for the later production of New Testament Scripture are the words spoken by the Holy Spirit *through human beings like Peter*. This pattern continues throughout *Acts* (refer to our previous 14-week study!) on into the letters of Paul. Defining what he means by "the gospel," Paul identifies events in the life of Jesus which took place "according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). He would later refer to "the word," "the word of truth," or "the gospel" in such passages as Colossians 1:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

This "word of God" did not lie lifeless on parchment pages but was, as Paul characterized it, "God's power for salvation" (Romans 1:16; also, 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2:13). The word of God always achieved something, in particular, it brought about faith and obedience (Romans 1:5 and 16:26). Once more, Wright captures the essence of all this:

The earliest church was centrally constituted as the people called into existence, and sustained in that existence, by the powerful, effective and (in that sense and many others) "authoritative" word of God, written in the Old Testament, embodied in Jesus, announced to the world, taught in the church.⁶

Again, we need to be reminded that when the New Testament referred to the *Scriptures* it was, at least for a time, referring to the *Old Testament* (Hebrew Bible). However, in due course, persons like Paul penned written works which extended the scope of Scripture. If we carefully listen to how the New Testament writers referred to their own work, we will hear them consciously acting as the authorized teachers of the early church, led by the Holy Spirit, and publishing written material to build up the growing Christian church. When the church read these written documents, they bore witness to "hearing in them" the Holy Spirit speaking in precisely the same way as he spoke to Israel in the Hebrew Bible. There was, therefore, a majestic unity between speaker and listener, allowing the church to affirm the formation of what we call the "canon" (or "rule") of New Testament Scripture. These new "books" had the same power and authority as those given to the older people of God. Did the writers of the New Testament *know they were writing Scripture*? I think the answer to this must be, "Absolutely!" Paul, for example, knew that God had authorized him to bring the word of the Gospel to the world, and in due course, to teach the churches as one authorized to do so.

Quite self-consciously aware of what he was doing when he spoke (and wrote), Paul penned the following text to the Corinthian Christians:

9 But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"- 10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. 13 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. 14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15 The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. 16 "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:9-16).

A few key ideas flow from this important passage:

1. Paul knew that God revealed to him "through the Spirit" the things which, ordinarily, people would not know through ordinary means, i.e., by seeing, hearing, or thinking.
2. The Spirit is able to do this because he "searches everything," including the "depths of God." What the human mind is to human thoughts, the Spirit is to the thoughts of God.
3. Paul has received "the Spirit who is from God" for the purpose of "understanding the things freely given...by God." That is, the Holy Spirit, living within Paul, gives to Paul the understanding of the gracious

⁶ Wright, *Ibid*, p. 50.

Gospel of God — the message about Jesus. The word "freely" is fingerprinted with grace, through and through!

4. Of all that Paul wrote here, this next statement is absolutely central: "And we impart this **in words** not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual" (2:13). If there could be a "technology of inspiration," then this would be its explanation! The Spirit, during the process of inspiring Scripture, imparts God's truth with *words*. This achievement makes it possible for other people to hear and understand what God is saying.

Peter, who knew Paul and had some dealings with him during the course of their respective ministries, confirmed that Paul was, in fact, writing Scripture:

15 And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, 16 as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Notice:

1. Paul "wrote according to the wisdom given to him."
2. Paul wrote in *all his letters* in precisely the same way as in *the specific case* Peter cites.
3. Not everything Paul writes is easy to understand.
4. Those who choose to do so will twist Paul's words *as they do the other Scriptures*. This plainly implies that what Paul wrote is **also Scripture**.

Earlier in the same letter, Peter offered a helpful summary of how Scripture comes into being, preserving both the role of God and that of the human writers:

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty... 19 And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:19-21).

Observe:

1. The *prophetic word* which announces the coming of Jesus, God's Son, (1:19) stands in contrast to *cleverly devised myths* (1:16), with as much vividness as a lamp shining at night or the sun dawning at daybreak. God's word is light which shines in dark places, confirmed by eyewitnesses of His majesty. Those through whom God's word arrives are consciously bringing light to the world.
2. The *prophecy that is Scripture* does not originate as a human interpretation of the truth.
3. *Prophecy* — words spoken from God — does not arise at the initiative of human beings.
4. Human beings *spoke from God*, but they did so as persons *carried along by the Holy Spirit*. This is an important metaphor, for it underscores the role of the Spirit as one who *leads, guides, and drives like the wind*. We might even hazard a guess that Peter had in mind nautical imagery, as of a sailing vessel blown along by the wind of the Holy Spirit. This seems likely since the Greek word for "Spirit" and for "wind" is the same term: *pneuma*, and it also can be translated as "breath." Creatively, these various usages weave together into a single idea: God's Spirit breathes, blows-like-wind, and guides the human writers (the prophets) as they produce the written word of God.

All Scripture and All of Us (2 Timothy 3:10-17)

10 You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, 11 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. 12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 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. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:10-17).

We now come to the central text for this week's lesson. It belongs to the larger context of Paul's very last written letter before he meets his death under the blade of Emperor Nero's executioner. Reading this passage as just another proof-text for the authority of the Bible seems highly out of place. Believing in the authority of God — as expressed through the medium of the Bible — was a costly thing for Paul. The inspiration of the Bible was not just another item Paul could check off before he died, like signing off on some kind of spiritual "bucket list." His second letter to Timothy was, after all, his swan song. He knew the end was in sight when he wrote these words:

6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Immediately, he places his pressing situation before Timothy with the additional request: "Do your best to come to me quickly..." (4:9). His situation is grave, he tells Timothy. Many people have deserted him, like Demas (4:10), while others attacked him when he was down for the count, like Alexander (4:14). Faced with making his case before the Emperor, nobody showed up as witnesses on his behalf (4:16).

Under such dreadful conditions, what did Paul want? Listen to his heart's desire, as death knocked on his door:

...so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it (4:17).

Take notice of the emphases: "the message," "proclaimed," and "hear it." Paul wanted to make sure that *through him*, the medium of God's revelation, the word of God would be spoken so that people might hear its message. The burden of Paul's work — to the very end — continued to be the communication of the word of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And yet, he makes certain we hear the important words, "*through me* the message..." That is what the inspiration of Scriptures involves: human instruments *through whom* the Holy Spirit might breathe the living word of God. The authority which Paul exercised, even during the closing days of his life, was a derived authority — "through me." He doesn't say, "from me" nor does he say "apart from me." Rather, he reminds Timothy how important it is that God's word be spoken, written, and lived through human instruments. That is at the heart both of the Gospel and of the authority of the Bible.

Seeing The Text in Context: A Survey of 2 Timothy

If we are to properly place this week's lesson in its larger context of 2 *Timothy*, we need to consider briefly the total message which saturates this last book written by Paul. It would hardly do for us to launch into a theological defense of Biblical authority in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, for example, while ignoring the pressing matter of Paul's imminent guilty verdict and approaching execution. That would be the ultimate insult. Perhaps a simple outline will help us insert our text in its proper context:

- .1 Salutation (1:1-2)
1. Body of the Letter (1:3-4:8)
 - a. Instructions to Timothy (1:3-2:13)
 - i. Don't be ashamed (1:3-14)
 - ii. Be confident instead (1:15-18)
 - iii. Share in suffering (2:1-13)
 - b. Warnings to Timothy (2:14-3:9)
 - i. Controversies (2:14-26)
 - ii. "Last Days" (3:1-9)
 - c. Charge to Timothy (3:10-4:8)
 - i. Example: Paul (3:10-13)
 - ii. Details (3:14-4:5)
 - iii. Completion (4:6-8)
2. Personal Greetings (4:9-22)

- a. Travel (4:9-15)
 - b. Trial (4:16-18)
- .2 Greetings and Benediction (4:19-22)

We also offer a *narration* of what Paul actually wrote to Timothy.

The Message of 2 Timothy

The psychology at work in 2 Timothy is fairly transparent. Paul is on trial for his life, and Timothy his young protégé is being asked to come join him as the trial finally plays out to the end. Paul is quite clear, as we noted above, in telling Timothy that most people have deserted him, probably out of fear and shame. As you will recall from our previous studies of the ancient world, "shame" played a huge role in shaping people's actions. The Mediterranean world was a culture of "honor and shame." How people saw you in your success or failure very much determined how you looked at yourself — and how other people would treat you. Paul had become accustomed to such treatment, first of all, because he preached a Gospel about a crucified man named Jesus. To both Jews and Gentiles that message was laden with shame. Jews didn't want to be associated with a failed Messiah; Gentiles didn't like losers — losers were fools. Yet, Paul could write in Romans 1:16, "I am *not ashamed* of the Gospel of Christ....," referring instead to the *power* which he witnessed whenever he proclaimed that Gospel. It didn't seem to matter to what audience he preached it. He found its reception utterly amazing.

Now that Paul was in the midst of his trial before the Caesar — something he personally requested as a Roman citizen — his own honor was on the line. For the greater part of his adult life, he had born witness to the God of Israel and taken his share of public ridicule for doing so. Preaching the Gospel of the crucified Jesus meant suffering *with that Jesus*, sharing in the sufferings of the people of God. But he had now arrived at his own "last days." Timothy was being called to join Paul — stand by him — during the finishing events of the trial in Rome. Paul had some loose ends to tie up with Timothy, even as Timothy needed some final guidance before his dear friend "departed to be with Christ." The letter Paul wrote reminded Timothy of several things:

1. His godly roots which resulted in a sincere faith, that is, a genuine one, free of hypocrisy and full of integrity (1:5). So far, so good.
2. But the flicker of faith needed to burst into flame. Timidity must make way for "power, love and discipline," something which Timothy apparently needed to work on (1:6-7)
3. Now comes the kicker: "Do not be ashamed of Jesus or of me..." (1:8).
4. How will Timothy make this huge step? He will do so by sharing in the sufferings Paul now faces in his trial and to which the Gospel calls both Paul and Timothy (1:9-12).

Timothy had "heard" a great deal from Paul (1:13), but the time has come to make good on what he heard. Paul describes what Timothy heard from him:

1. "Sound teaching" (1:13).
2. "The good deposit entrusted to you" (1:14).

That is, the fresh word of God, both in the form of Paul's oral speech and written letters, must be carefully preserved and faithfully practiced by Timothy. *Inspiration* for Paul meant that God had entrusted His word to people like Timothy who then had a responsibility to "keep it" both by doing it and protecting it. And to drive home his point, Paul offers a handful of examples showing what happens when people fail to properly handle the inspired word of God entrusted to them: they desert their fellow Christians just when they most need their help (see 1:15-18).

Speaking to Timothy like a son, Paul encourages him to be strong in the face of hardship and suffering. Part of that process involves entrusting to others the inspired words Timothy received from Paul (2:1-3). The word of God Timothy received from Paul addresses him like a soldier facing hardship at the frontier outposts who must please his commanding officer (2:4); like an athlete competing for the prize in the games and must obey all the

rules (2:5); like a farmer who works hard for the harvest (2:6). Just as God inspired the word He gave to Timothy through Paul, He must also make it clear to Timothy under these new and dire conditions (2:7).

The word of God cannot be put into chains though those who preach it might be. Through the word of God *salvation* (read, "deliverance") will finally come to God's people, and Timothy must be faithful in bringing its message to them (2:8-10). The word of God is "a trustworthy saying," and it calls God's people to be faithful even to the most painful end of their lives (2:11-13).

Paul tells Timothy that he is a *workman* assigned the task of *handling the word of truth* correctly (2:15). All around him, Timothy will find sloppy workmen of the Word who think that the Scriptures are a debating tool or a source of cleverly spun theological ideas. Such persons introduce into the church false teaching and immoral conduct with ruinous consequences (2:14-18). In utter contrast, Timothy must see Scripture as "God's solid foundation" engraved with an indelible inscription: "God knows His people and wants them to walk the talk" (2:19). The purpose of Scripture is to make His people "useful for the Master" and "prepared for any good work" (2:20-21).

When people oppose the message Timothy gives them, he must first make sure his own life is governed by a "pure heart" (2:22). Then he must teach the word without engaging in useless arguments, but communicate its message with kindness and without resentment (2:23-24). If his teaching brings opposition (and it will!), Timothy must persist in his instruction, trusting that God will use the *knowledge of the truth*, found in Scripture, to bring his opponents to repentance ("change of heart") and away from the entrapments of Satan who wants people to do his will instead of God's will (2:25-26).

A sharp warning punctuates Paul's next words to Timothy. He uses the Greek words *en eschatais hēmerais*. The phrase "in last days" occurs without the use of any definite articles in its grammar. What does he mean, and how does Timothy understand him? If we take the foreground of the letter seriously, it's the "last days" of *Paul* which are most apparent. But even beyond the most pressing circumstances of Paul's trial lies the impending events leading up to two major political revolts which will shake both the Empire and Israel to their foundations. Those two "seasons" or *kairoi*, as Paul describes them in 3:1, are 1) the series of assassinations which will bring down the present imperial dynasty in Rome, led by Nero, and eventually install a new one in the person of Vespasian (and later, Titus and Domitian). 2) In the midst of the "year of the four emperors" (68-69 C.E.), Rome faces the revolt of Judea which takes place 66-70 C.E., leading to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple.

I submit that Paul's own trial, the civil war in Rome and the revolt in Judea more than satisfy Paul's depiction of "last days" during which "terrible times (seasons, *kairoi*)" dominate the world stage. Paul asks Timothy to be the faithful shepherd of God's people during such fateful times. "Last days," then, is not a fixed expression only referring to one set of events. Rather, it is a descriptive term — a stock phrase — having to do with seasons in history when the world comes unraveled, and seems to be lost. "Last days" are 9/11-type days; they are "the stock-market-fell" kinds of days; they are "dark-ages-when-the plague-came" kinds of days. Rather than referring to something *chronological*, they refer to those *seasonal* events in human history when one world "comes to an end" and a different world stands in its place, forever changed.

And so, in 3:1-7, Paul offers Timothy a portrait of what the world-which-is-falling-apart looks like:

2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. 6 For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, 7 always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. 8 Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. 9 But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men. (2 Timothy 3:2-9).

Most of us see our own times in this picture! Paul predicted such times would eventually overtake Timothy and his generation. Paul's spiritual discernment was right on target, as the events of 66-70 would prove. Death would overtake Paul sometime during that period, leaving Timothy with responsibilities to guide the churches. Among the several features of "last days," we are struck by this one: "...always learning and never able to arrive at the knowledge of the truth" (3:7). The Greek puts the verbs "to learn" and "to be able" in the present tense as participles, thus emphasizing the *continuous learning* along with a *continuous inability*. By contrast, the verb "to arrive" occurs in the aorist tense. Taken together, Paul is telling Timothy that the "last days"-people *keep on learning* and *keep on being unable* to *finally arrive* at the knowledge of the truth. Something is drastically missing from their lives. We might say, "No matter what I do or say, some people never seem to accept the Gospel."

Such a frustrating failure requires the further explanation which Paul offers to Timothy by way of illustration. Citing Jannes and Jambres, Paul is calling attention to the magicians⁷ who opposed Moses when he announced both the coming judgment on Pharaoh and the coming Exodus of Israel from Egypt. The comparison is striking: pagan Egyptian priests who stand opposed to God's prophet Moses, and "last days" reprobates who contradict the Gospel Paul and Timothy proclaim to the world. In effect, the Gospel, like Moses, is calling human beings out of their slavery to *this world*, while at the same time announcing judgment on those who failure to respond to the Good News — and even resist it! Paul writes about the "folly" of such persons. The Greek word in 3:9 is *anoia* is simply referring to "lack of understanding." Why do they lack this understanding, and why did they oppose Moses (and now Paul/Timothy)? The answer is forthcoming, but seems evident from the surrounding text: 1) they do not have God's word in their hearts: they refuse the witness of the Bible; 2) they refuse to accept the truth when it is presented to them. Moses spoke God's word, and the magicians *knew* what that word said. Paul preached the Gospel, and so gave the word of God to these "last days"-persons, who refused to accept it.

The Inspired Word of God: The Key Passage and Its Meaning

With the preceding context of our passage well in hand, we now turn to the text itself. It belongs to the larger "charge" made by Paul to Timothy, a unit comprising 3:10-4:8. We limit our detailed discussion to 3:10-17. This section has two distinguishable parts: 1) Example of Paul's life (3:10-13), and 2) the first part of Paul's charge to Timothy, focused on Scripture (3:14-17).

Paul's Life: The Imprint of Scriptural Authority (3:10-13)

Timothy *knows* Paul, and 3:10 begins with that certainty. The students of a rabbi spent time with him, observing his conduct, watching him react to his surroundings, following the line of his reasoning, observing his study of the Bible, and thereby becoming his disciples. In training his young converts, Paul likely followed the tried-and-true rabbinic forms, modified by what he learned of Jesus' own teaching style — probably from some of the Twelve. How did Paul's experience with the Word of God shape his life? He tells Timothy in this section "you know all about my teaching..." The Greek word translated as "know all about" is a form of the verb *parakaloutheō* which means "follow closely, give careful attention to, accompany, attend." From the context, Paul seems to imply that Timothy has not merely *known* what Paul taught, he also *followed it* for himself. The sort of "knowing" represented here is not intellectual but moral and ethical. That is, the *didaskalia* ("teaching") by Paul became the foundation for Timothy to imitate the sort of life Paul lived.

The authority which God exercised in the life of Paul through the Scriptures left its imprint on Timothy. "The teaching..." formed in Paul...

1. the way of life
2. the purpose

⁷ The biblical reference to obstinate Egyptian magicians appears in Exodus 7:11, 22; 8:18-19; 9:11). The Bible does not give these two proper names, but extra-biblical writings, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, identify them. See CD 5:18-19; Midrash *Tanḥuma* on Exodus 32:1.

3. the faith
4. the patience
5. the love
6. the endurance
7. the persecutions
8. the sufferings

This "list" of virtues closely parallels the "fruit of the Spirit" found in Galatians 5:22-23. That is, "the teaching" by Paul is the product of the Spirit's own teaching of Paul, as we discovered in 1 Corinthians 2 (above). The credit for Paul's ability to live the life depicted in 3:10-11 goes to the Spirit *working through the teaching*. Once teaching assumes a written form, under the direction of the Spirit, Scripture is born. Since we have come to the end of Paul's earthly life with the writing of 2 Timothy, it is safe to infer that the whole collection of Paul's letters, considered together, make up "my teaching" (Greek: *mou tē didaskalia*). Perhaps the word "my" gives us trouble in this case, since it seems to suggest that *Paul* is the true author. However, in Greek, we may be dealing with an objective genitive rather than a possessive genitive: "the teaching of me" would come closer in meaning than "my teaching," where the subject would be Paul. Only because the Holy Spirit "taught" Paul with divinely chosen "words," is he able to make the kind of claim for his own life as we find in 3:10-11.

These "virtues" (faith, patience, etc.) are formed in the crucible of Paul's missionary travels, and he especially underscores these in 3:11b by citing the painful experiences in Antioch-Pisidia and Iconium, climaxing with his stoning in Lystra where, you will recall, he was "left for dead." What Paul tells Timothy in 3:12 looks very much like what we read in Acts 14:22b when he tells the new believers in those cities, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." The counterpart to that here is, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." He expands his meaning by writing about, "evil men and impostors," using the Greek terms *ponēroi* and *goēs* to describe wicked persons who are "charlatans." Paul thereby sets up a stark contrast between the life of the *Spirit* — mediated by the teaching of Scripture — and the life of *ponēria*. His choice of words for "evil" is interesting, since the root idea is "toilsome, painful, grievous." Such persons, unlike those taught by the Spirit, are sources of trouble for others and useless in themselves. Synonyms include, "good-for-nothing, a knave, a rogue." Paul caps his comments about these "evil persons" by warning Timothy how they "deceive" others.

Moral bankruptcy surrounds Paul in Greek-Roman culture. His experience with Judaism had not been much better, since his fellow-Jews have chased him out of Gentile cities all across the Roman Empire. The fact that he stands in Caesar's court is, in part, due to the conniving of the Jerusalem authorities who opposed his preaching of the Gospel (see Acts 21:27ff). Yet, in spite of the discouraging pressures, Paul remains committed to the way of life taught him by the Spirit — a way of life he commends to his young student, Timothy. And more so under the developing circumstances: things were going from "bad to worse". In the Greek text, this idea is expressed by the verb *prokoptō* which means "to advance, progress, grow, far gone" in conjunction with the prepositional phrase *epi to cheiron*, "toward the worse." The preposition *epi* used with the accusative case carries the sense of "towards" when used with verbs of movement, as in this case. We might say that things were "spiraling" out of control. Paul uses the case of *deception* to illustrate his point: "deceiving" and "being deceived." **When the standard of truth is gone, ironically, those who deceive others are just as easily deceived by others.** That is the curse of all forms of relativism, which proves to be a double-edged sword. The same rule which allows me to "make up the truth" and to claim that there is no absolute truth, grants the same liberty to my enemies who may well do the same thing to me!

Paul then proceeds to offer a stark contrast, appealing to the life of Timothy himself. The words "But as for you" appear in the Greek as *su de*, a sharp adversative along with an emphatic pronoun. Timothy is commanded by Paul to "remain" (*mene*) "in what things" (*hois*) he "learned." Two different verb tenses are used: 1) Timothy is asked to persist *in the present*, in 2) whatever he learned *in the past*. The call is for continuation, faithfulness, and reliability. Seeing Timothy as the living link between two generations (Paul's

and Timothy's), Paul seeks to shore up the present efforts of his young student who must preserve and pass along the solid tradition taught him by others. Nor is his task limited to only what he "learned," since it includes what he has come to "believe," *epistōthes*, an aorist verb form *in the passive voice*, which has the added sense of "be entrusted with." The verb *pisteuō*, which is the expected term for putting faith in or on something, trusting something, also acquires, in the passive form, the idea of *being given a trust*, something for which a person is responsible. By being taught by Paul (and others), a trust or *deposit* has been handed to Timothy, and Paul appeals to him to take good care of it. That deposit is none other than the truth which, through Paul's writing, has assumed a written form in his letters. We might speak aptly of a *deposit of revelation or truth from God*. That is precisely how Paul phrased it earlier in his letter to Timothy — that "good deposit" entrusted to you (1:14). The Bible — including the growing New Testament — is the deposit of truth for which Timothy becomes responsible.

Paul then elaborates the nature of that *trust-fund of truth* by reminding Timothy that he "knows" (*eidōs*) "from whom he learned" the truth with which he is now entrusted. Timothy is, then, not just abstractly responsible for *something called "the truth,"* he is responsible *to the persons who gave it to him*. We don't need to look far to discover who these special people were that handed Timothy the truth. In 3:15, Paul writes how Timothy *apo brephous*, "from childhood," "you knew the *hiepa grammata*, that is, the holy writings." The *gramma* refers to anything written or drawn, including lines, letters, pictures, or musical notes. Taken collectively, *grammata* refers to records, documents, papers, letters or books. Plainly the emphasis is on the written nature of a communication. Paul adds the word *hiera* in order to distinguish the writings he has in mind from ordinary works of literature or other written materials. "Holy writings" refer to what comes from God Himself, set apart and dedicated for His special purpose. Then, as now, things are written down in order to preserve them. As we noted above, the ancient covenants were written down *so that they might be the official documents substantiating the covenant for a later time*.

In addition to the written documents, there was also those persons put in charge of them. By being taught the "holy Scriptures," Timothy was being put in charge of them. Instruction was an act of committal on the part of the instructor to the student, and for which the student became responsible. But Timothy was not just handed a pile of documents and told, "Here, take these books— they are the Bible — don't lose them!" A much deeper kind of *deposit* was handed to Timothy: one which, as Paul puts it, constitute "the things which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." In a much bigger sense, Timothy's life is a "living Scripture," written by the Holy Spirit on the pages of his heart and mind, transforming him by rescuing him from sin and death *if it is combined with faith in Christ Jesus*. Sacred Scripture *is able* to impart saving wisdom to Timothy only if he receives its message with an open and trusting heart — open to God's grace and trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation. Note Paul's use of "living Scriptures" in 2 Corinthians 3:3 (and the wider context).

We know from 2 Timothy 1:4-5 (see above) that Timothy learned his "sincere faith" through the instruction of both his mother and grandmother who, as we would expect from Jewish parents, gave them a sound education in the Jewish Scriptures.

In 3:16, Paul shifts from the Greek word *gramma* to the word *graphē* in referring to "Scripture.". However, there is no real difference in meaning, since the two words share a common root idea. *Gramma*, in the plural, refers to the Scriptures in the following cases: Matthew 21:42, 22:29, 26:54, 56; Mark 12:24 and 14:49; Luke 24:27, 32, 45; John 5:39; Acts 17:2, 11, 18:24, 28; Romans 1:2, 15:4, 16:26; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Tim. 3:15; 2 Peter 3:16. *Graphē* refers to Scripture in these passages: Mark 12:10, 15:28; Luke 4:21; John 2:22, 7:38, 42, 10:35, 13:18, 17:12, 19:24, 28, 36-37, 20:9; Acts 1:16, 8:32, 35; Romans 4:3, 9:17, 10:11, 11:2; Galatians 3:8, 22, 4:30; 1 Timothy. 5:18; 2 Timothy 3:16, James 2:8, 23, 4:5; 1 Peter 2:6; 2 Peter 1:20. That amounts to some 52 instances, and the underlying meaning is unwavering: the reference is to God's Word in written form.

Scripture: Inspired and Useful

As we examine 3:16-17, the major teaching about "the inspiration" of Scripture comes front and center. Most translations in the NIV/ESV tradition begin the passage as follows:

"All Scripture is God-breathed (or inspired by God) and is useful..." The actual Greek text is:

pasa graphē theopneustos kai ōphelimos.

What is conspicuously absent from the original wording is the verb "to be," or in this case the word "is." Instead it appears as if the text could read, (1) "Every Scripture God-inspired is also useful....," which implies that not all Scripture is God-inspired, but only the parts which are useful for the doing the things that Paul explains in the rest of the passage. This, of course, raises all kinds of questions about the *extent* of divine authorship within Scripture. But there are other options, such as, (2) "All Scripture, being God-inspired, is also useful..." In this case, there is no implication that only a portion of Scripture is God-inspired, but that *since all Scripture is God-inspired* it is also useful. (3) "All Scripture is God-inspired and useful..." becomes a variation of #2 in handling the text.

Part of the problem rests with the translation of the word *pasa* which can be treated as 1) "every", or 2) "all." In the case of #1 above, "every" suggests some Scriptures are and some are not inspired. Usually the word "every," when it is used with a noun that doesn't have the article "the," calls attention to the individual members of the group to which the word applies. In this case, "every" treats "Scripture" as a group and "every" calls attention to some Scriptures but not to other Scriptures. However, if Scripture is really a collective noun, then the word *pasa* should be translated as "all" and the emphasis falls on the "whole" collection, not just parts of it. The respected Greek grammarian, Moule, opts for "all" for precisely this reason.⁸ So do we. There can be no doubt that Paul is using the technical word *graphē* to describe the collection of Hebrew sacred writings. We also think he applied the same word to his own authoritative letters, written by the direction of God to the various churches or persons in his care. In no sense, could he have meant only some Scriptures in the collection, but not all.

Now we come to the meaning of *theopneustos*, a word which does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament. Is this a passive verb form or an active verbal one? As a passive it places the source of Scripture in "the breath of God," which originates in and comes from God. As an active, then, it tells us how the breath of God fills Scripture, making it "inspiring."

In deciding the meaning (active or passive) we must take into consideration that words having a *-pneustos* ending, found in compounds, originally had the passive sense and that the active sense always became a derived one. And so, a compound may have both an original passive sense and a derived active sense, but not both senses simultaneously. Furthermore, this passage in 3:16 does not say that *the writers* of Scripture were inspired (or inspiring!), but that Scripture itself *is inspired*.

The lexicons typically translate the word as "inspired by God," treating it as a compound of *theos* ("God") and *pneō* ("to breathe"). Compounds with *-pneustos* are *verbal adjectives*, arising from verb stems. That is, they are really participles, having both verb and adjective features, used in a passive sense. So how was the word *theopneustos* formed? Clearly, by taking the verb *pneō*, placing it in the passive form by adding *-tos* to it. The resulting meaning is unquestionably, "God-breathed," as the context also suggests.

The next issue is what we are to make of the relationship the word *theopneustos* has to the subject or predicate of the main clause of 3:16. Does it function as an *attribute* of Scripture in the subject of the clause, or does it belong to the *predicate* of the clause, as traditional translations have suggested?

In the Greek expression *pasa graphē theopneustos kai ōphelimos*, the word "is" might be implied before *theopneustos*, as a predicate adjective: "All Scripture *is* God-inspired and useful." Or we might insert it after

⁸ C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968, p. 95.

theopneustos as an attributive adjective: "All God-inspired Scripture *is* also profitable". Citing twenty-one exact parallels to 3:16, one study of the word sequence, *pas* + noun + adjective, has shown that the adjective has the *attributive* meaning.⁹ Several examples from the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible have the same order and in which the adjectives are predominantly attributive (Genesis 1:21,30; Exodus 12:6; 18:26; Deuteronomy 1:39; 17:1).

The term *theopneustos* is not simply an incidental description of *graphē*, but is the focal point of the passage. Paul first shows Scripture's origin and then he shows its practicality. Scripture's main identity is that it is God-breathed, that is, it *originates in God* as its source. Scripture acquires its existence from the creative breath of God, and therefore Scripture is "useful" in making the Christian "perfect, thoroughly furnished for all good works."

The language applied to Scripture as "God-inspired" is really equivalent to saying that it is "God-breathed." It is a feature of both Greek and Hebrew that the words for "spirit," "breath," and "wind" are the same. The Old Testament regularly speaks about the "Spirit of God" and uses the word *ruah* to do so. Genesis begins with the Spirit of God sweeping the unformed stuff of creation like the wind blowing back and forth. It also describes the animation of human beings in terms of God breathing the breath of life into them. For Paul to adapt the word *theopneustos* to the production and power of Scripture fits nicely into the overall framework of God's new creation. Therefore, when we speak about the "inspiration of the Bible," we are simply saying that it is breathed out by God, its source, empowered to be the medium for exercising His authority in the world. This is not a matter of saying that the Bible is "inspiring" — a fact belonging to any number of human creations — but "inspired," given its very life by God's own Word.

But Paul does not give Timothy this bit of instruction so that his understanding of theology might be more complete. Timothy knew full well that Scripture was "God-breathed" long before Paul wrote 3:16! What Paul wants his young student to see is that since *Scripture is God-inspired*, certain things flow from this fact. He refers to those by using the Greek word *ōphelimos* which means "helping, serviceable, profitable, advantageous, beneficial, for a purpose." Its related root, *ophellō*, means "to enlarge, increase, strengthen." From this we see that Scripture doesn't exist *for its own sake* but as the means through which God intends to increase His kingdom work as the Gospel is proclaimed and as believers are strengthened by its message. By contrast, the various false authorities which Paul warns Timothy to avoid, do not create benefit but disaster instead. The clear mark of God's Word is *the benefit it creates in the world, God's new creation*; the sign of the false word is the *chaos* which comes in its wake.

What, then, are the benefits which flow from the "breath of God" — the proper use and study of Holy Scripture? Briefly, Paul lists these:

1. "Teaching." From the Greek word *didaskalia*, this may be a summary term which gathers together all of the words which Paul uses below. That is, Paul identifies the "usefulness" or "benefit" of Scripture with its teaching value, but then goes on to unpack the meaning of "teaching." Certainly, there were plenty of "teachers" with whom Timothy and Paul competed in their discipling of young Christian converts. Not all of these teachers were producing students whose lives reflected the good character of God. Paul wants to make clear the specific ways in which teaching should properly function. People can use the Bible in all sorts of ways to teach, but not all of them contribute to the spiritual growth and well-being of its students.
2. "Reproof." Paul uses the Greek word *elegmos* which belongs to a family of words, including *elegxis* and *elegchos*. The key idea in each case is the careful cross-examining or testing of something, with a view to finding its errors, disproving its claims, uncovering its faults, leading to a conviction about its true character. The goal of reproof, used in this sense, is not to reject something but to *improve* it. The classical writers

⁹ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament In the Light of Historical Research*, Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934, p. 791.

sometimes used this term when *giving an account* of a person's life. Scripture, when applied to the human life, reveals the true intent of the heart and soul. As the writer of *Hebrews* portrayed its role: "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and *discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart*" (Hebrews 4:12). The word translated "discerning" is actually the expression from which we get our English term "critic" (Greek: *kritikos*). In its sometimes painful, but useful role, the Bible is the critic of our lives, identifying our faults so that we might know where we stand in need of genuine change.

3. "Correction." More positively, the Bible offers the solution to the faults uncovered by its role as critic. The Greek word in this case is *epanorthōsis*. The main root of this term is the familiar *orthos*, the basis for such English words as "orthopedic," "orthotics," "orthodox," and "orthodonture." In each case, we are concerned with the "correcting" or "revising" of something. Paul uses the compound form, *epanō + orthos*, where the preposition has the general meaning of "above" and the implied meaning of "more than." There is also a Greek verb form, *epanuō*, which means "to complete" or "to accomplish." Taken together, this aspect of "correction" means to correct something "from above" "by making it more complete" than it is at the present time. *Correction* and *reproof* are opposites sides of the same coin. Scripture, in its reproof, tells us what is wrong, but then goes on to show us how it can be corrected. The Bible is not only our *critic*, it is also our *correction*. It offers the *remedy*, not only the *refutation*. God is interested in our improvement: He is the author of the new creation, and Scripture is His medium for communicating the means for that improvement to His children.
4. "Instruction in righteousness." The word *paideia*, translated here as "instruction," also occurs in Hebrews 12:7 where it has the more nuanced meaning of "discipline." Classical writers used the term to describe "the rearing of a child," "training or education," "culture, learning, accomplishments," and "forming proper habits of conduct." We notice the progression in Paul's explanation of how the Bible operates in our lives. In this case, the Bible functions like a trainer, leading the Christian through a course of rigorous discipline for the purpose of producing *righteousness*. Judging from the varied meanings of *paideia*, we see an emphasis on something called "virtue," the end result of proper training: the formation of moral habits. The Greek word for "righteousness" is the familiar *dikaiosunē*. Paul normally employs this term in the context of our proper standing or status before God, and it has strong connections to the law-court. However, it also has moral and ethical meanings having to do with "making something right" or "putting it into proper form." Whereas God declares us to be "*in the right*" because of the work of Jesus on the cross, He also wants us to "*be right*" as our lives undergo renovation and character development. Not only does the Bible *declare* us to be "justified" — declared innocent, it also is the medium whereby we *become* "righteous" *in fact*. Through the Bible, God the Spirit exercises his authority in our lives, training us in the ways of righteousness.
5. "Competence." Paul introduces a purpose clause at this point in 3:17, showing where all of this leads us. The Bible has a long-term, as well as a near-term, goal. Ordinarily the word *paideia* (above) refers to the training process of a youth who is on the road to adulthood. Paul now uses the phrase "man of God" (*ho tou theou anthrōpos*) to describe the "youth-become-an-adult." That is, when the Bible exercises its influence in our lives, it shapes and matures us so that we are no longer "children" but "full-grown adult sons and daughters of God." Because the Bible is the medium of God's authority exercised in our lives, we ought to see the fruit of its work as we surrender our lives to its instruction. The result: full-grown, maturing, flourishing human beings." Quite consciously, Paul wants Timothy to see the difference between what the false teachers accomplish in people's lives and what the Bible accomplishes. Examined honestly, there really is no comparison at all: the Bible's fruit in people's lives far outweighs the false teaching.
6. "Equipped for every good work." Whenever writers in Paul's day use the Greek word *exartizō* or related terms built on the *artiz-* root, the fundamental idea is "to be ready." Words like *artizō* and *artios* all suggest that which is "just so," based on the underlying adverb and preposition, *arti*. Our English word "art" also lies at the center of these various forms. An artist is someone "accomplished" at their work. Such expressions as "the art of being a ___" illustrate this emphasis. Paul tells Timothy that the proper use of the Bible in people's lives renders them "artists of good works." While the Bible makes clear that "good works" do not "save," it is insistent on seeing good works become an essential part of Christian development. A few examples will show that this is the case:

- a. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, said "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your **good works** and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16).
- b. When Luke commended the Christian disciple Dorcas, he wrote: "Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of **good works** and acts of charity." (Acts 9:36).
- c. Paul, describing God's purpose for our lives, tells one of his churches: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for **good works**, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10).
- d. One of the qualities Paul looked for in a godly woman: "but with what is proper for women who profess godliness- with **good works**." (1 Timothy 2:10; also, 5:10).
- e. When addressing the "rich in material things," Paul says: "They are to do good, to be rich in **good works**, to be generous and ready to share" (1 Timothy 6:18).
- f. Leaders in the church, like Titus, are encouraged in this way: "Show yourself in all respects to be a model of **good works**, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, 8 and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us" (Titus 2:7-8).
- g. As people who belong to God, we are to follow the leading of the one: "...who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for **good works**" (Titus 2:14).
- h. Paul tells Titus: "...those who have believed in God [should] be careful to devote themselves to **good works**. These things are excellent and profitable for people." (Titus 3:8; also, 3:14).
- i. As a worshipping community, the church should: "...consider how to stir up one another to love and **good works**..." (Hebrews 10:24).

When Paul concludes his second letter to Timothy in the verses which follow 3:17, he once more underscores the perilous situation of the church living in "last days." He writes about "the time" which "will come" in which the wider culture will show no interest in "sound teaching" (4:3). The underlying Greek word for "sound" is the basis for our English term "hygiene:" that is, "healthy" or "health-producing" teaching. Not all teaching produces a healthy church. The proper use of the Bible, as Paul outlined in 3:16-17, will have healthy effects on church life. That is why in 4:2 Paul tells Timothy to "preach the word," and to do so "in season and out of season" (Greek: *eukairōs akairōs*). Several shades of meaning are present in this expression: 1) when times are good and when they are not; 2) when it is convenient, and when it is not; 3) when it is popular and when it is not. Granted, Paul sees Timothy and his generation as part of "last days," when the world is unraveling before them. In such a "season" preaching the Bible is necessary as a corrective and remedy. On the other hand, when "first days" are present, and things are on the upswing, the Bible is equally essential as the trainer for righteousness.

Preaching/teaching of the Bible, then, is the Pauline response to "last days." Through the proper application of its message to Christian existence, persons are corrected, rebuked and encouraged by faithful pastor-teachers, writes Paul (4:2b).

Celebrating Scripture: Reading the Bible as Worship

Our last study portion comes from the *Psalms*, a collection of Hebrew poems normally associated with worship, but also a source of wisdom for the people of God. As we consider a few select texts from this part of the Bible, we do so in celebration of the role Scripture has in the life of the church.

The *Psalms* were placed first in that part of the Hebrew Bible known as the *Kethubim* ("The Writings") and, in time, came to represent the whole collection as its chief and principal literature. After all, there are 150 psalms in the Psalter! And the very first Psalm makes the following definitive statement: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; 2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD [that is, *Torah* of Yahweh], and on his law [that is, *Torah*] he meditates day

and night" (Psalm 1:1-2). What follows in the Psalm (which you should read) is a description of what happens to make such a man "blessed". From the outset, the reader is told *why he is blessed*: because the meditation on Torah is a central discipline of his life. But what is "meditation"? The word in Hebrew (*hagah*) refers to one of several activities: 1) the cooing of a dove; 2) the growling of a lion; 3) a moan; 4) reading in an undertone; 5) pondering, as in talking to oneself; 6) planning; 7) speaking; 8) muttering. It may also characterize the contented sound of an animal chewing its food, delighting in the experience. And that is what the Psalmist says about Torah: it is a source of delight. Torah, according to Psalm 1 causes a person to become suitably established beside nourishing waters where he is fruitfully alive.

In a later Psalm (19), he continues his meditation on Torah, but offers a schematic for his study of it. The following chart maps the key nuances of God's Word as found in Torah. We are presented with nouns, adjectives and verbs, neatly arranged in 19:7-14:

Noun	Adjective	Verb
Law, instruction, guide: Torah	Perfect, complete	Revives
Testimony	Sure, firm, confirmed, verified	Makes wise
Precepts	Right, straight	Gives joy
Commandments	Radiant	Gives light
Fear of Yahweh	Pure	Endures forever
Judgments: mishpatîm	True, righteous, precious, sweet	Warns, rewards

This table answers three questions about God's Word: 1) what it is; 2) how it is; 3) what it does. As the Psalmist concludes this Psalm, he confesses his "secret faults" and admits the possibility of "willful sins". It is from these, he writes, that the study of the Torah delivers him. He concludes his poem with a petition and invocation: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer" (Psalm 19:14). And how does that happen? Through the reading, meditation and study of God's Word. What we speak and how we think come under the direction and instruction of the Word found in the Bible, and David acknowledges its effectiveness through this Psalm.

Now we come to our chosen Psalm text: chapter 119, a chapter some have termed "The giant among the Psalms". It is the longest chapter in the Bible, extending to 176 verses. In addition to its length, we note its organization: **each grouping of eight verses is titled with a single letter of the Hebrew alphabet**. We call this format an acrostic poem because the twenty-two letters used here are the actual letters which begin the first word of each section. For example, the first section (119:1-8) begins with the Hebrew word *'ashrēy* which means "Blessed" and its initial letter is *Aleph*, the very first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This pattern continues throughout the Psalm until the last letter, *Taw*, is reached. Following such design is a form of literary art, embellishing the text with skill and variety, much like painting a picture with a rich palette of color. But it may communicate a bit more, namely, that in a real sense God has taken up human language *in all of its manifold forms* and used it to convey the truth of His Word to human beings. In this case, the Hebrew language comes to embody the language of God: He writes His word with Hebrew letters!

Derek Kidner, in his nicely written two-volume commentary on the Psalms, notes that the mood of Psalm 119 is "meditative; the poet's preoccupations and circumstances come to light in prayers and exclamations, not marshaled in sequence but dispersed throughout the psalm" (p. 417). Here is a many-sided revelation of what Scripture is for the Psalmist, and parenthetically for us. David employs eight different Hebrew words for God's Word (*Torah*) throughout his twenty-two stanzas, and, to borrow Kidner's analogy, like eight bell ringers, he conducts their chimes periodically throughout the Psalm. By so doing, David helps us understand in its totality what God's word should be for us. Those eight Hebrew ideas are catalogued below with some general remarks about their meaning. **As you read them, consider this question: If the Word of God (our Bible) is like that,**

how then, should we study it? That is, how does the character of Scripture help us in choosing the right tools for interpreting it and explaining its meaning?

1. "Law" (instruction, guidance): *torah*. This word unifies all the others and appears most frequently throughout the Psalm. The verb root means "teach, direct" and in the Old Testament can mean either a single instruction or the whole body of God's written word. From this term we come to see that God's Word has to do not only with what we "know" but what we are to "do" with what we know. God wants to "direct" us and "guide" us by His word, and *Torah* best captures that sense.
2. "Testimonies": *'edūth*. We see this word in such places as Deuteronomy 31:26 and 8:19, as well as here in 119:24. The "ark of the covenant" was also called the "ark of the testimony" because in it was placed the two copies of the covenant (the *berîth*) given by Yahweh to Moses on Mount Sinai. Together they were a combined testimony, a verification of the truthfulness of God's covenant with His people. God's Word is dependable, reliable, frank, outspoken and the highest standard for truth.
3. "Precepts": *piqqūdîm*. Derived from the Hebrew word for officer or overseer, this word emphasizes God's attentiveness to detail as expressed in His Word. God is in the details.
4. "Statutes": *huqqîm*. This word comes from the notion of "standing firm" or well-established, and identifies Scripture as permanent and "inscribed" by God forever.
5. "Commandments" : *mitzwōt*. The nuance here is that the Word comes from the authority of God, and His right to give orders.
6. "Ordinances": *mitzpātîm*. Older translations call these "the judgments", that is, the rulings of God who is our Judge and before whom we bring out case. God's Word contains His righteous and just verdicts on matters affecting our relationship to Himself and with others.
7. "Word": *dābār*. That which is spoken by God: simply put, what God has said whether declaration, promise or command.
8. "Promise/Word": *'imrā*. Has to do with God standing by what He has spoken; His Word is His bond.

In addition to these eight words identifying Scripture's nature, the Psalmist also reveals his response to God's Word:

1. Delight: (119:72, 111, 127, 162). This means God's Word brings joy to the one reading and studying it.
2. Love: (119:20, 40, 103, 131). The emphasis is on the affection of David for the Word of God.
3. Awe: (119:161). From this response comes an appreciation for God's Word as *righteous* (119:7, 75, 123, 138, 144, 172); *dependable* (119:42, 86, 142, 151, 160); *unshakable* (119:89-91, 152); *inexhaustible* (119:18, 27, 96, 129).

What benefits does the Psalmist derive from Scripture? He underscores the following:

1. Freedom (119:45, 96, 133): Most significantly this liberation is from sin in his life.
2. Light (119:34, 66, 73, 98-100, 103-105, 125, 128, 144, 169): Light is primarily a metaphor representing understanding, knowledge and insight. It also means the ability to make moral distinctions based on the wisdom of God.
3. Life (119:17, 25, 37, 40, 50, 88, 93, 107, 144-159): The role of Scripture as revitalizing power appears throughout the Psalm.
4. Stability (119:23, 24, 49, 50, 76, 89-92, 95, 114-118, 165): In the face of threats to safety and constant distractions, the Word of God grounds the Psalmist. When the world changes, the Word does not.

Of special importance for this study are the following texts, many of which illustrate the key ideas discussed above:

- 9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.
- 25 My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word!
- 27 Make me understand the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works.
- 33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end.
- 89 Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.

105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Concluding Thoughts

In his book, *Simply Christian*, N.T. Wright titled his chapter on the Bible, "The Book God Breathed." His opening paragraphs are worth including here:

It's a big book, full of big stories with big characters. They have big ideas (not least about themselves) and make big mistakes. It's about God and greed and grace; about life, lust, laughter, and loneliness. It's about birth, beginnings, and betrayal; about siblings, squabbles, and sex; about power and prayer and prison and passion.

And that's only Genesis.¹⁰

Wright goes on to remind the reader that the Bible is "nonnegotiable. It's a vital, central element in Christian faith and life. You can't do without it, even though too many Christians have forgotten what to do *with* it." He continues: "It helps, in all this, to remind ourselves constantly what the Bible is given to us *for*." Citing this week's key passage, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, he underscores the words "*Equipped for every good work*; there's the point. The Bible breathed out by God...so that it can fashion and form God's people to do his work in the world."¹¹ Making some important distinctions, Wright adds:

In other words, the Bible isn't there simply to be an accurate reference point for people who want to look things up and be sure they've got them right. It is there to equip God's people to carry forward his purposes of new covenant and new creation. It is there to enable people to work for justice, to sustain their spirituality as they do so, to enhance relationships at every level, and to produce that new creation which will have about it something of the beauty of God himself. The Bible isn't like an accurate description of how a car is made. It's more like the mechanic who helps you fix it, the garage attendant who refuels it, and the guide who tells you how to get where you're going. And where you're going is *to make God's new creation happen in his world*, not simply to find your own way unscathed through the old creation.¹²

Within the Nazarene *Articles of Faith* is the following affirmation about the Bible:

IV. The Holy Scriptures

4. We believe in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, by which we understand the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation, so that whatever is not contained therein is not to be enjoined as an article of faith.

(Luke 24:44-47; John 10:35; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 1 Peter 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:20-21)

A few brief comments follow about the terminology found in this *Article* as applied to our view of the Bible.

1. "Plenary," though an uncommon word in ordinary speech, appropriately expresses our understanding that "all" Scripture — the Bible in its *fullness* — is God-breathed. The Latin word *plenus* is the basis for the more technical term "plenary."
2. "Holy" suggests both the uniqueness of the text as originating from God and the effect the Bible has — makes holy — on those who are shaped by it.
3. "Inerrantly..." Rather than applying the word "inerrant" in its adjective form to a book, the statement of faith wisely affirms the process by which Scripture makes known the "will of God" (another way of speaking about God's authority), using the adverb "inerrantly" to do so. This word tells us that the Bible is reliable, truthful, and without error *in revealing the will of God*.
4. "Revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation." Our concern is with the role of the Bible in achieving God's purposes for His world through us. "Salvation" is an overarching idea, and pertains to God's rescue of His fallen, lost and dying creation, restoring it to wholeness once again. The Bible is the medium of God's authority for achieving this goal. It is not an end in itself — pointing to itself — but communicates the Good News about God's will "concerning us..."

¹⁰ N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian*, San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2006, p. 173.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 182.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 182-183.

5. "An article of faith" should be based on nothing else than the affirmation of Scripture. This echoes Martin Luther's view, "Where Scripture speaks, we speak; where Scripture is silent, we are silent"

Glory to God! Amen.

Digger Deeper: *NazaRemix — Just What IS a Nazarene?: We Are Bible-Based*
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *NazaRemix — Just What IS a Nazarene?: We Are Bible-Based*, carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. List five characteristics of the Bible, and why they are important. Now list five challenges you face as you read and study the Bible. How have you tried to overcome these challenges?
2. The Bible is one way that God exercises His authority. What does the Bible tell us about the authority of God, according to the following Scriptures: Romans 13:1; John 19:11; Matthew 28:18-19?
3. The phrase "word of God" applies to the Bible, but also refers to _____ (see John 1:14; Hebrews 1:1-2; Revelation 19:11-16).
4. What relationship do these two uses of the phrase "word of God" have to each other according to John 5:39-40? What error might we fall into if do not carefully distinguish these two meanings?
5. In what ways does the Bible serve as the medium through which God exercises His authority (Psalm 33:6; Jeremiah 23:29; Isaiah 40:8; Isaiah 55:10-11)?
6. How did Jesus describe his relationship to the Scriptures (Matthew 5:17-18; Mark 14:49; Luke 24:27, 44-45)?
7. Using 1 Corinthians 2:9-16, discuss the process by which Scripture is produced. Who is responsible for its creation, according to this passage?
8. Read 2 Peter 1:19-21 and 3:15-16. What does Peter tell us about the origin and the Bible? What does Peter tell us about the writings of Paul and why is this significant?
9. The key passage for this week is 2 Timothy 3:1-17. After reading it, construct a simple outline.
10. What sorts of challenges to "truth" does Paul list in 3:1-9? How do you interpret the phrase "last days"? Do you think that throughout human history, "last days" have occurred more than once?
11. How does the Bible address the problems created by these "last days"?
12. In 3:10-13, Paul tells us how the "teaching" of Scripture has impacted his life. List the various ways.
13. Timothy is urged to allow Scripture to have a continuing effect on his life (3:14-15). Discuss the ways.
14. What terms does Paul use to describe Scripture in 3:16? Explain the different terms, paying special attention to the term "God-breathed" (or "inspired by God"). What does it mean for Scripture to be inspired? What does it *not* mean?
15. Paul looked for the benefits of Scripture at work in the life of the church. What are those benefits according to 3:16b-17?
16. What lasting effects should we look for in people's lives if the Bible is properly taught to them?
17. When Paul says that a person should be "equipped for every good work," how does the Bible help make that happen?
18. Prayerfully read the length 119th Psalm. What are the different words which the psalmist uses for Scripture? How does the psalmist "celebrate" the word of God in this psalm?