CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER
717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	**The Nicene Creed**		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	**44**		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	**2 Timothy 3:16, 17**		
Date:	**July 6, 2025 (a.m.)**		

WHO SPOKE BY THE PROPHETS

Whenever you read the Old Testament prophets saying, "Thus says the Lord," it is the Holy Spirit speaking through them. Cary rightly notes, "The Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life, gives us everlasting life mainly by giving us divine words. For it is Christ who is our life (Colossians 3:4), and he is given to us by the word of God, which is in turn given to us by the Spirit inspiring all who testify to Christ in the Scriptures, for he is the Spirit of Truth who guides them into all truth (John 16:13). The New Testament describes Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16) as divinely inspired, or *God-breathed,* adding that it is profitable for teaching, for reproof and correction, and for education in justice (2 Timothy 3:6)."[1] What is involved in this work of the Holy Spirit? Does this guarantee that what is inspired is free from error? In 1976, Harold Lindsell dropped a bomb on the Evangelical world with his eye-opening book, *The Battle For The Bible.*[2] In his analysis, he described how Evangelicalism was being threatened by the forces determined to undermine our confidence in the inerrancy of Scripture. This book was instrumental in leading to the formation of the ICBI, The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy.[3] As I have from time to time noted, a group of self-professed Evangelicals who have labeled themselves *Post-Conservatives* have emerged to challenge, among other things, the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy that helped to shape and define 20th century Evangelicalism. The term "Post-Conservative" was first coined by erstwhile Evangelical Arminian Roger Olson in the pages of *The Christian Century*.[4] Olson has been banging this drum for some time, "Why 'Inerrancy' Doesn't Matter," *The Baptist Standard* (March 26, 2006): 1-2. Dave Tomlinson, in a book that is popular in what is called "the Emergent Church," offers a section titled "Inerrancy? A Monumental Waste of Time." Tomlinson goes on to declare, "I have no intention of arguing against this doctrine; I simply marvel that anyone should think it plausible or necessary to believe in such a thing." Dave Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical* (London: Triangle, 1995), 105. Finally, James D. G. Dunn, a leading scholar for the so-called New Perspective on Paul, echoes the 19th Century liberal Charles Brigg's assessment by declaring inerrancy "exegetically improbable, hermeneutically defective, theologically dangerous, and educationally disastrous." James D. G. Dunn, *The Living Word* (Philadelphia: The Fortress, 1988), 107. Critics like Millard Erickson described this as the new "Evangelical Left," and has taken umbrage with how Olson has responded to his critics.[5] Olson, in mirroring the Post-Liberal Yale school theologians like the late Hans Frei and George Lindbeck, wants very much for Evangelicalism to escape what he calls the Old Princeton's hegemony with its stifling scholastic methodology. In particular, Olson complains that the Old Princeton placed way too much emphasis on such doctrines as penal substitutionary atonement and Biblical inerrancy. These supposedly distinctive trademarks of genuine Evangelicalism need to be abandoned.[6] As we shall see, this has struck a very responsive cord in what goes by the name "The Emergent Conversation." The late Robert Webber, one of the individuals who openly celebrated the developments identified with the "Evangelical Mega-Shift," sees the rise of the Postmodern evangelicals as the next step in this mega-shift, calling it "a new evangelical awakening."[7] Another highly influential figure (also with direct links to the Evangelical Mega-Shift) was the late Stanley Grenz. Grenz was, in many ways, the most prominent figure in the group, and his writings continued to provide the theological and philosophical identity for the movement. Grenz argues that the break between the modern and post-

modern worlds may rival in historical significance the shift from the Middle Ages to modernity. "Fundamentally," he argues, "post-modernism is an intellectual orientation that is critical and seeks to move beyond the philosophical tenets of the Enlightenment, which lie at the foundation of the now dying modern mindset." As such, the new intellectual era calls for "nothing less than a rebirth of theological reflection among evangelicals."[8] Many people pay their respects to the Bible; they are even willing to acknowledge that the Bible contains some useful information. But does it provide us with a decisive criterion by which we are to live . . . and die? Our conception of Scripture is therefore extremely important, because, as John Murray correctly observed, "as will be our conception of Scripture, so will be our conception of the Christian faith. What, then, is to be our conception of Scripture?"[9] The text before us today defines, in a way unsurpassed by any other text in the Bible, how Scripture as to its ORIGIN, CHARACTER, AUTHORITY, and PURPOSE is to be understood. What we find in this text is Scripture's assessment, or verdict, as to its own distinctive character.

I. ***THE CONTEXT.*** This is Paul's *last* epistle (2 Timothy 4:6). We usually attach particular interest to the last words of men, and so here also we should note the importance of what Paul has to say as he approaches the end of his life.

A. ***The Times.*** The Apostle was writing in "the last days" of world history (2 Timothy 3:1, I Timothy 4:1). This is a reference not to some distant future end times. The "last days" began with Christ's first advent (Hebrews 1:2; Acts 2:17).

B. ***The Exhortation.*** Paul is calling Timothy to remember this in order that he might conduct himself with all sobriety, knowing that perilous times lay ahead (2 Timothy 3:1–4). Because of this, the apostle urges his young disciple to remain steadfast in the doctrine Paul had taught him (2 Timothy 3:14).

II. ***THE IMPORT.*** How is this relevant? The "last days" have not run their course. *We* are in these *last days*, and it is in this context that Paul delivers his great statement on Scripture. We do well to take note, for we are subject to the same wavering of faith that faced Timothy.

A. ***The Instrumentality.*** Every word of the Bible came through the agency of man . . . be it Moses or David or Paul. Human authorship is not suppressed or overlooked. But this does *not* mean that the Scriptures, having passed through the hands of sinful men, have the infirmity that we always attach to the efforts of man. A number of recent attacks on the doctrine of inerrancy have zeroed in on the *humanness* of the Bible, which they argue has necessarily implied fallibility. A. T. B. McGowan for example argues that the Scriptures are human documents, produced by human beings, which nevertheless have come to us from God, and as such, he argues we should not invest them with divine qualities, i.e., that are inerrant[10] But texts like Ps. 12:6 and 19:7 declare that God's Word, mediated through human beings, remains *pure* and *perfect.* And Christ Himself declares that the Scriptures are *unbroken* and *eternal* (Matt. 24:35).

B. ***The Author.*** The Apostle declares, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." What does this mean? The word translated "inspiration of God" (KJV) is *theopnuestos* and occurs only here in the New Testament (and is not found earlier in all Greek literature), but its meaning is not in doubt. The lexical *consensus* is clear. The word means "God-breathed" (as in NIV) "and, in accordance with the genius of the compressed, clear Greek compounds, this includes in itself the implication that the words are *spoken* by the *Spirit of God*."[11] This is not only the force of the words selected by Paul, it represents his understanding of Old Testament texts like Psalm 33:6; Isaiah 1:20 and 40:5.

C. ***The Extent.*** "All Scripture is God-breathed." Some have argued that *all* here cannot really mean *all* in the absolute sense because the Bible contains much that is not God's word, e.g., the words of the serpent in Genesis 3:1–5. But Paul's point is this: it is by God's actions that what the serpent said is written. Thus we have the revelatory word of God in recording not only the agency, but also the strategy, of the evil one, so that the Scriptures, in the fullest and strictest sense of the word, are

the revelation of God -- "How much Satan deplores this inscripturated revelation! It is Satan's art to conceal his own strategy. It is God's grace to expose it."[12] Scripture, it must be declared, is a fixed body of writings. As such, this means no more or no less, that it is a fixed body of words, sentences, clauses, paragraphs, chapters and books. God is not continuing to give inscripturated revelation. The Bible, and the Bible only is the written Word of God.

III. ***THE UTILITY OF SCRIPTURE.*** Notice how this is put: it is *profitable* (KJV), *useful* (NIV) - from the word, *ōphelimos* to help (cf. 1 Timothy 4:8). Four spheres are mentioned in which the usefulness of Scripture can be seen. Two deal with doctrine and two with practice.

A. ***Doctrine and Reproof.*** One is distinctively *positive*; the other represents the *negative.* Doctrine is concerned with what is true.[13] The Scriptures are concerned with absolute truth, and doctrine has to do with the whole wide range of thought respecting God, the world, man, life, death—there is no area that this does not touch. If we have no interest in doctrine, we have no interest in God.

B. ***Correction and Training.*** This is the ethical plane. Again, the negative and the positive aspects are underscored.

IV. ***THE PURPOSE.*** "There is a distinct objective in this profitableness of Scripture. The verse opens with a clause introduced by *hina,* which denotes that purpose or result."[14] What is this purpose? So that "the man of God" may be equipped. Who is this person? It is the person who has been laid hold upon by God, separated unto and possessed by the true and living God. Note in particular the word *thoroughly*. It is a term that expresses comprehensiveness. There is *NO* situation, *NO* demand, *NO* circumstance that confronts us in which the Scriptures are not adequate and sufficient.

CONCLUSION: A *New* Battle for the Bible now confronts us – and this one may be more fierce than those that have preceded it simply because the combatants are wearing the same uniforms! That's right. All of the recent attacks on the doctrine of inerrancy are coming from individuals fervently claiming to be committed *Evangelicals.* What is happening? David Wells, in one of his most recent book, documents the changes that have occurred within the rank and file. Classical Evangelicalism in the 20th Century was a coalition built around two core beliefs: The full inerrancy and authority of the Bible and the necessity and centrality of Christ's penal substitution. "What this meant for them was that faith that was biblical would, of necessity, be doctrinal in its form. This, in fact, was so much more than simply asserting the inspiration of Scripture and its inerrancy. In the early days of the movement, a whole way of thinking grew out of this primary commitment. It meant that being biblical in tone and content was central. From this grew churches that valued biblical truth and Christian life that sought its nourishment in the Word of God. The publications from these early days, the books that were published, and the sermons that were preached all bear this out."[15] What happened was that Evangelicals began the process of *acculturation.* The constant and unending cultural bombardment of individualism, subjectivism, and pure paganism signaled the end of a robust Biblical *and* creedal theology and with it the inevitable demise of doctrinal distinctives like inerrancy and penal substitution. Now more than even we desperately need to heed Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:1-2 – "be not conformed to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Only the inerrant Word of God can do this.

ENDNOTES

[1] P. Cary, *The Nicene Creed: An Introduction* (Lexham Press, 2023), p. 192.
[2] H. Lindsell, *The Battle For The Bible* (Zondervan, 1979),
[3] In the same decade that Lindsell's two books appeared, the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy was established to defend the doctrine. This council held a series of academic and lay conferences and commissioned a series of volumes. It drew up "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" (1978), which was published in the volume *Inerrancy* (1979). This statement represented for large numbers of evangelicals a responsible exposition of the doctrine. In other publications, scholars such as J. I. Packer, Kenneth Kantzer and D. A. Carson argued that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, carefully defined, represents what the Bible teaches about itself and what the "central tradition" of the Christian churches has maintained. In the late 1980s conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention met with success in their attempt to gain control of the convention. They were determined to bring the doctrine of biblical inerrancy back into more prominence in Southern Baptist seminaries. Thus the debate regarding biblical inerrancy showed few signs of slackening at the end of the 1980s. cf. J. Woodbridge's article, "Inerrancy Controversy" in *Dictionary of Christianity In America*, eds. D. G. Reid, R. D. Linder, B. L. Shelley, H. S. Stout (IVP, 1990) p. 575.
[4] "Post-Conservatives Greet The Postmodern Age," The Christian Century 112 (May 3, 1995). Olson in a recent exchange with Mike Horton, declared that he never claimed that he was a "post-conservative" evangelical saying, "I did not *spearhead* post-conservative evangelicalism, nor did I announce it as a *program*. In my descriptive article in Christian Century where I coined that term (*post-conservative evangelicalism*), I merely set out to describe a new mood among certain evangelicals. I said that it is not a movement (let alone a *program*). And nowhere did I identify myself as post-conservative; in fact, I included some cautionary notes at the end of the article. I gladly admit that I have some sympathies with this new mood of evangelical theology that is dissatisfied with maintenance of the status quo as evangelicalism theology's main task. But I have not promoted any *post-conservative evangelical program*. I have simply sought to bring this new mood to public attention and gain some understanding for it. When I wrote that post-conservative evangelicals are not necessarily committed to the Chalcedonian formula of Christology, I did not mean that they have anything less than a high Christology of Christ as human and divine; I only meant that they are not necessarily committed to the technical language and concepts of the doctrine of the hypostatic union. There are other ways to express a high Christology and some post-conservative theologians have attempted to do it without in any way denying Christ's full and true deity and humanity." See "The Nature & Future of Evangelicalism: A Dialogue between Michael Horton & Roger Olson," http:// www.modernreformation.org/mhro03dial.htm.
[5] M. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left* (Baker 2000), and his chapter "On Flying In Theological Fog" in *Reclaiming The Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* eds. Millard Erickson, Paul K. Joss Helseth, Justin Taylor (Crossway, 2004). We gladly acknowledge our debt to this particular book that served to stimulate our own.
[6] Olson has displayed an intense dislike for Reformed theology in general and Old Princeton in particular. In his recent book, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (IVP, 2006), Olson takes umbrage with Warfield's review of his contemporary, the noted Methodist theologian John Miley, which appears in the *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield II,* ed. J. Meeter (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973) pp. 308-320. Olson calls this "a lengthy attack" (26) and elsewhere a "caustic attack" (278), declaring that Warfield's criticisms "were stated in such an extreme way as to raise questions about Warfield's own generosity of interpretation and treatment of fellow Christians. Many twentieth century Calvinists know little about Arminianism except what they read in nineteenth-century Calvinist theologians Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield. Both were vitriolic critics who could not bring themselves to see any good in Arminianism. And they blamed it for every possible evil consequence they could see it possibly having" (26).
[7] Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals* (Baker 2002). Webber's earlier work, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Post-modern World* (Beker, 1999) serves as a primer for many Post-modern evangelicals.
[8] As cited in *The Challenge of Post-modernism: An Evangelical Engagement,* ed. D. S. Dockery (Baker, 1995), p. 78.
[9] *The Collected Writings of John Murray* III (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), p. 256. The original Westminster Faculty (especially John Murray) publications on this subject have shaped this sermon and my own understanding of Scripture.
[10] A. T. B. McGowan, *The Divine Spiration of Scripture: Challenging Evangelical Perspectives* (Apollos, 2007) pp. 121-122.
[11] B. B. Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* in *Works I* (Baker, 1981), p. 263.
[12] Murray, op. cit., p. 259.
[13] David F. Wells has documented the tragic loss of truth in the Church's attitude toward doctrine in his book *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Eerdmans, 1993). Lee Strobel, one-time associate pastor at Willow-Creek, wrote a book titled *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary: How to Reach Friends and Family Who Avoid God and the Church* (Zondervan, 1993). One of the disturbing aspects about this book was the statement that unchurched people's "question is not so much, *Is Christianity true?* but, *Does Christianity work?*" This was stated in such a way as to imply that pragmatism is the solution in our evangelism.
[14] In the New Testament Greek grammar this is called a "hina-purpose-clause," cf. Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles: The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Eerdmans, 1972), p. 165.
[15] D. F. Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-Lovers, Marketers and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Eerdmans, 2008) pp. 7-10.