

# Reading on 2 Timothy 3

by John Nelson Darby

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*John Nelson Darby's sermon emphasizes the divine inspiration and authority of Scripture, urging believers to recognize its sufficiency and the role of the Holy Spirit in understanding it.*

**Scripture:** 2 Timothy 3:15

**Topics:** "Authority of Scripture", "Divine Inspiration"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the significance of Scripture in his sermon on 2 Timothy 3, asserting that all Scripture is divinely inspired and holds authority over believers. He discusses the importance of recognizing the Scriptures as the word of God, contrasting it with temporary prophecies and addressing common misconceptions about the Apocrypha and other writings. Darby highlights the necessity of divine teaching for understanding Scripture's authority and the role of the Holy Spirit in discerning its truth. He also reflects on the personal acquaintance with Scripture that Timothy had, underscoring the direct authority of God's word over individual lives. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper engagement with the Scriptures to experience their transformative power.

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## Transcript

Paul first speaks of the fact that Timothy had known the Holy Scriptures (v. 15); and then he says of every Scripture that it is inspired of God (v. 16). It is an important word, 'Scripture.' Prophecies may have died and passed away, as in the case of Agabus, who prophesied a famine coming; there may have been plenty of such prophecies, which were only temporary communications; but the fact of its being written is what gives Scripture its importance. So Peter speaks of "no prophecy of the scripture" as coming by the will of man.

Ques. Why do people not like its being the word of God?

Because they do not believe it; they say the word of God is in it, but they will not allow that it is itself the word of God. The expression used here, is, "divinely inspired." Of course, there is Scripture now which did not yet exist when Paul was writing to Timothy.

Ques. What does Peter mean by "private interpretation"?

That "no prophecy of scripture" has within itself its own interpretation.

Ques. What authority is there for rejecting the Apocrypha?

Every kind. One positive reason is, that it never was in Hebrew at all; and as to outward testimony, it never was classed with the Scriptures by the Jews. But to have the real knowledge of the Scripture authority, you must have divine teaching. The division the Jews made of the Scriptures, was into, the law, the prophets, and the psalms. Josephus tells us there were prophets after the time of Artaxerxes (i.e., Malachi's time), but they were not of the same authority as those who went before. That, of course, is not a divine way of knowing about it. It is said that the Song of Sirach was translated into Hebrew, but it was not. The best way to determine about such books is to look into them. Take Maccabees, and you will find something to this effect: "I have done my best to make an epitome of the five books of such a man, for it is very tedious to have too much to read, and if I have done it well, then it is worthy of the matter," and so on. Think of saying that is inspired!

328 Ques. What of the suppressed gospels?

They are not suppressed.

Ques. Why do you reject them?

You have only to read them. As to outward testimony, too, it is distinct enough. That there were but four is clear; the fathers say that as there were but four rivers in Paradise, so there are but four gospels, naming them - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Ques. Was Matthew written in Hebrew?

There is a rumour of a Hebrew version of Matthew's gospel, but it is all a nonsensical story. Lucas or Lucius, a known inventor of fables, tells you that Christ when a child, on one occasion, changed His companions into ducks, etc., etc. Look at Tobit, and his dog; it is absurd! Bel and the dragon may be true, but it has nothing to do with inspiration. There is no real difficulty as to the Apocrypha for a person who is really in earnest. In the preface to the Vulgate, Jerome, referring to the Apocrypha, says that these books cannot be inspired, and that, though not inspired, the Church only reads them for the benefit of manners.

But the real knowledge of inspiration comes from the operation of God. I believe Scripture proves itself; it is spiritually discerned.

We have the Lord's positive sanction to the Old Testament in Luke 24:44, when He speaks of the law, the prophets, and the psalms.

Ques. What is, "furnished"?

It is the idea of being complete so that there is no articulation wanting. The word that is used is a strong one.

Ques. Does it refer to any particular place the man of God is to hold?

No, it makes him fit for a place. This Scripture is one that shews the all-sufficiency of the word. External testimony is important to confound adversaries; but while it may prove the folly of man, it never can give faith.

Ques. What are, "prophetic scriptures," in Romans 16:26?

The epistles more especially. The only thing that gives faith is the power of the Spirit of God.

Ques. What endorses the New Testament books?

External evidence gives many quotations, and so on. There never were any other books than the list we have, that were considered to be 'canon,' so-called, though some of these, as 2 Peter, have been set aside. The Revelation was fully received at first, and came to be doubted in the Church about the second or third century. So with Hebrews; it was not left out until the third century, and then only because it opposed certain innovations. Again, there came injunctions not to read anything but these inspired writings, for Clement's epistle used to be read, and so on, though not inspired. Eusebius gives us a complete list, and declares that none other was to be received as sound. The two epistles of John, being small, appear to have been much less copied, and it was late before they were received. There are translations of them in the first century, as in the Syriac Peschito which has them. They were translated a very few years after John's time.

329 There were false epistles as well as false gospels. One, to Laodicea, is a set of Paul's writings put together; but nobody who reads them can believe in them. Clement's is a very nice letter to try and get the Corinthians not to turn off their elders, just the sort of letter that you or I might have written in that kind of way. He writes in the name of the church at Rome, and he does not set up to be inspired. There is no difficulty about it really; but only divine power can give real discernment.

In 1 Corinthians 2 we have three things: (1) "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God"; (2) "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth." Paul got them by the Holy Ghost; then he gave them out by the Holy Ghost; (3) the natural man does not receive them, but the spiritual man does so. We find here an authoritative statement of the way in which these things were given, taught, and received; and they are in the word of God which carries its own evidence with it. A person has only to read the things which pretend to be inspired, and he will soon find out the difference. In the New Testament, the Holy Ghost is more human in his operations than in the Old Testament. In the latter, it is, "Thus saith the LORD"; whilst in the New Testament, the Holy Ghost comes down into the midst of all their actions, and utilises everything, even to a care for the body, or for the cloke left at Troas, or for wine for the stomach's sake, or, again, for Onesiphorus' house; and in Romans 8, the Holy Ghost feels the consciousness of the saints, as down here, with "groanings that cannot be uttered."

330 Even in Old Testament times there were different characters of inspiration. "If there be a prophet . . . the LORD . . . will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, . . . with him will I speak mouth to mouth," etc. (Num. 12:6-8). But while there is this difference in character, there arises no question as to authority. The Jews did make a difference, for they had the Mosaic degree, and the prophetic degree, and the "Bath Col," or daughter of the voice - the writings or Kethubim.

In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God came down and spoke in the circumstances in which an individual was who might not be aware that what he was speaking was an absolute prophecy. Instead of it being their own mind they expressed, the prophets did not always know what it meant. This is clearly seen in the Psalms, and also in 1 Peter 1:11, 12. "Thus saith the LORD," may look to be a higher thing than other scriptures that are without it, but it is not so.

A reference to a Hebrew Bible will show at once what is included in the three above-mentioned divisions; and the Lord gives His sanction to them in the main.\*

{\*NOTE. - "The Law," includes the five books of Moses; under "the Prophets," are Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings - the "former prophets"; and Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel. Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai Zechariah, Malachi - the "later prophets."

Under the "Psalms," the Kethubim or Hagiographa ("holy writings"), are the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Canticles, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles.}

Ques. Is there anything special in the order of the books of the New Testament?

Many editions of the New Testament give another order, but I believe we have it in as good order as need be. We may notice that Galatians comes in pretty far on, though but an elementary epistle.

Ques. What of the order of the Psalms?

I believe that is divine; but it can be only known by spiritual apprehension.

In the epistles to churches, we have the foundation and building up as it ought to be. Timothy is, in measure, the same; but in the catholic epistles, as they are called, we find that, speaking generally, the church is already looked at as gone down.

331 The first epistles written were the two to the Thessalonians, then 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans. The last-named, and Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians were written when Paul was a prisoner; Galatians is uncertain, but late. John's gospel was, I suppose, last. Matthew's gospel may have been first, but as to that, it is human testimony, not internal. 2 Timothy must have been late. Corinthians and Galatians have a moral order; one being for correction of walk, and the other for doctrine.

There is another point to notice in 2 Timothy 3, "From a child thou hast known," etc.; there we find individual personal acquaintance with the contents of the Scriptures. And Timothy knows, too, from whom he had learned them. In these days the individual thing is important, I mean, the direct authority of the word of God over the conscience.

It is a question whether the word of God has directly an adequate authority for each of our souls.

We own the word of God, of course, but its direct authority over us is more, and this has now come to be a specially important truth, leaving aside for the moment the question of derivative instruction. Not that one individual may not teach another rightly, but the divine word takes more hold of us than we think. True, a person may get into the habit of hearing and learning Scripture to the blunting of his mind and conscience, but where the Spirit of God works, that gets sharpened up again. Looked at as an instrument, writings are higher than words. Suppose I was a prophet, and I said, 'this house will tumble down tonight,' that would have its own meaning by itself. But God had a plan and mind before creation, which has been since revealed in the word by the Spirit of God. A spiritual mind perceives this, and it becomes effectual in those who believe. The completeness of the word of God, when known, settles for faith the canon of Scripture.

Ques. Would you say that the canon of the New Testament Scripture was authenticated by the church?

I admit the fact, but not the authority, otherwise I should be making the church the authority for the New Testament.

Ques. Then is it the Spirit in us that settles what is Scripture?

Well, in a sense it is; that is to say, the Spirit brings home the witness into our souls.

332 Ques. What do you put above the word?

Nothing.

Ques. What settles it?

It is effectual in them that believe. The mere protestant ground is that of the right of private judgment. I once said to a priest, 'If I took a knife and gave you an awful gash in your arm, how would you know it was a knife?' Change "knife" into Maccabees, or, Matthew's gospel!

The question, in itself, as to how we are to know we have the Scriptures, is simply infidel ground. I ask, 'How do we know the sun shines?' And if a man says, 'I do not know,' well then, I reply, you are blind. The blind man may say, 'That is all very well, but how can I help it?' Yet, for all that, he is blind.

Man's will rejects the word of God, but that same word judges him, I do not. How did the woman of Samaria know Christ was a prophet? Why, she felt it in her own soul. "The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." That is how I know its power, because it has power over me, reaching first my conscience.

Ques. What is the difference between the soul and conscience?

The soul is the part of man that has to say to God.

The external evidence of the Scriptures would be ground enough for faith; but when I come to spiritually understand them, I find then another character of evidence. As I go on, I see such and such things. To Stephen, heaven was opened, and then he sees Jesus, the Son of man, as an object. There is a kind of evidence which supposes we have a spiritual mind to begin with. And the word begins with conscience; and that is all right.

To return to our illustration, the difficulty would be, to prove it was a knife to one who had not been cut by it. If anyone accepts the internal evidence, I am so far glad, because the coals are there, and the spark has only to be put to them. A roused conscience may shew enmity; as when the Jews gnashed on Stephen with their teeth, but they were convicted in their conscience at the same time. "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."

333 Ques. How are you to convict a Socinian? How can you?

Well, I cannot do so. But if such a one remains a Socinian, I can say he will be lost. Of course, no man can give faith to another.

Ques. Do you alter "at," into "by," in 2 Timothy 4:1?

Yes; "I testify before God and Christ Jesus, who is about to judge living and dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom, proclaim the word," etc. Compare with this Deuteronomy 4:26 in the Septuagint. We have had the furnishing of the man of God, and now we have his active engagement. Service is connected with the future, and so he is charged by His appearing, etc.

Ques. What a thought it is for us, that the professing Church all around is so insensible to the coming of Christ!?

Yes; as to that, I do think the general state is awful. As regards dissenters, there is no professing body so out of the way as to the things of God as they are. Clearly, they have been teaching rationalism at Stepney. Though I used to be a churchman, I had a respect for dissenters because they were persecuted; but when once they were relieved from that cross - which always was respectable - they became more worldly, and now, in so much have they the upper hand. At the present time, the alliance between Liberals, Infidels, and Catholics is very suggestive, but I always expected it. The Chairman of the Congregational Union recently gave a discourse which was simply rationalism, saying, you must go on with the times, and that it is an exploded folly taking the Scripture as the word of God; that we have some fifty or sixty books put together, written by fallible men, full of mistakes and errors, though containing the word of God. The Laodicean state of things is, I think, coming in fast.

Ques. How is increase of power to be obtained?

We must go to the source. I do not expect much power to be obtained in any external way. I have never had an instant's doubt that the path of brethren was of God in testimony, and if everybody was to leave it, all I should say would be, that one is conscious for oneself of being a very poor hand at it. There is plenty of failure with us too. But the character of Christ's strength is, that it is made perfect in weakness; we must be weak, if we are to be made strong by Him.

Ques. Are we not in a position like that of Nehemiah?

Well, yes; only, I think Nehemiah was a poor kind of man;

Daniel is a better illustration. There was a great deal more in Ezra than in Nehemiah. Nehemiah was continually saying, "Think upon me, my God," for this or for that.

334 Ques. Was Mordecai right in taking the place he did?

I suppose so; it was exalting the Jews in this world.

The Lord has, I think, allowed revivalism to gather out souls, and that in a hurry; but not that He sanctions revivalism. The last time I was in Dublin, poor W was speaking against the coming of the Lord.

It is a good thing to look death in the face, but that does not interfere with the hope of our Lord's immediate return.

Ques. Is worldliness a sign or source of weakness among us?

Both; for these things act and re-act. The expectation of the Lord's return would not prevent me going on with the ordinary business of life. If I am really expecting my Lord, I shall earnestly desire to be found doing my duty at the moment of His return.

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