

# Is the Bible Enough?

Geoffrey Thomas

Our Lord Jesus Christ tells of two men, a rich man who rejects God and a beggar whose trust is in the Lord (Luke 16:19-31). Both of them die, and the beggar goes to heaven, while the rich man goes to hell. One reason he tells this story is so that we may know something of what comes after death. Many will enjoy the pleasures of heaven, but others will suffer the horrors of hell.

This rich man who is suffering the torments of hell makes two requests of Abraham. First, he asks to be relieved of his torment, which is unbearable. But Abraham tells him that that is impossible, saying in effect, "All your lifetime you received your good things; you were reminded of the certainty of death and judgment; you were warned to flee from the wrath to come; you had been told of the mercy and long-suffering of the grace of God; you were told to seek that mercy and find peace through the gospel." But after death it is too late.

The second request of the man in hell deals with his five brothers. They are still in the world, so the man in the pit devises a scheme by which they will not join him there (because their presence, no doubt, would make his hell five times worse). He devises a plan of evangelism—which many human beings do. He imagines a way of delivering his siblings from the place of woe. The five brothers all know the beggar who lived his life at the gate of their rich brother's house, and they all know that he died. So the rich man says to Abraham, "Send that man, Lazarus, from your side back to my brothers to show himself to them as one raised from the dead. The result of that will be that they will all become believers, especially when he tells them about hell. If a man should be raised from the dead and tell them what is happening to me, they will change. They will no longer curl their lip and say, 'Nobody's ever come back,' but they will believe in God and escape hell." That is the wisdom of a man in hell. That is his proposal.

That request sparks a debate between Abraham and the man in hell. Abraham argues one side, and the man in hell argues the other. Abraham defends the position of those who believe in God through the Lord Jesus Christ, and the man in hell defends the position of those who use human reason and never trust

the Savior in this world or the next. This argument is still going on. It is important for us to see what this argument consists of and the difference between the two approaches.

## **THE POSITION OF FAITH**

On one side, there is Abraham and all who believe as he did. One thing is true of every one of them: they are satisfied with the Bible. Theologically, we would say that they hold to the sufficiency of the Scriptures to save any person from hell. Abraham says: "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them" (vs. 29). Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. There is Genesis, which tells us that God is a personal God, an almighty Lord, and how he made the world, and why the world is in the state it is. It speaks of the great answer to man's rebellion in the Christ who one day will come and bruise the serpent's head. Then, in Exodus, we are told of the Passover, of those for whom a lamb had died substitutionally, and how the angel of death had passed over all of them. Because of the lamb whose blood had been shed, they were forgiven. The book of Leviticus tells us that "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins" (Heb. 9:22). It points to the sacrifices of redemption instituted by a loving God. The book of Numbers tells us of the brazen serpent lifted up in the wilderness, and that if men obediently look on who and what

that represents, they will have life. The book of Deuteronomy tells us of the covenant relationship between God and his people—Jehovah, the great I Am, pledging himself to be their God and Savior for ever and ever.

"They have Moses," Abraham says, and the rich man's brothers also have all the rest of the Old Testament written by the prophets, who together speak of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is there in it all. So Abraham says, "Let them listen to them." How much more should we today listen to those who were eyewitnesses of Jesus' majesty, who were with him in the upper room, and who heard his cry, "Peace be still!" and saw the waves obey him, and who helped unloose risen Lazarus from his graveclothes. Should we not listen to those who by the Holy Spirit were led into all the truth in what they wrote? Do you see Abraham's argument? The Scriptures are enough to bring a man to faith in Jesus Christ. The Scriptures themselves are more than sufficient to save a man from hell.

Then Abraham adds, in words to this effect, in verse 31: "If they do not listen to the Bible, nothing else will convince them; nothing else will do any good, not even the specter of a resurrection before their very eyes." So the question is, Do you agree with Abraham? On one side of the debate, the man in

hell says that it seems a great idea to him to send a man back from the grave to the world of the living to warn them (vss. 27-28). But Abraham replies, "They have the Scriptures, let them hear them." "No," the rich man says, "the Bible is not enough." He has no confidence in the Word of God. He is saying, "They need something more than the Bible if they are going to be saved from hell." This man thinks that the Bible is an ineffective book, that you cannot expect anyone to get serious about eternal life and flee from the wrath to come simply by reading the Bible, or by hearing sermons from the Scriptures.

### **THE POSITION OF UNBELIEF**

Now, it is very interesting that the man in hell addresses Abraham respectfully and calls him "father Abraham" (vs. 24), and that the patriarch acknowledges that and responds to him with the word "son" (vs. 25). In other words, this man was a fellow Jew—a member of the Old Testament covenant people. He had been circumcised, and ethnically and outwardly he was a son of Abraham. The Lord Jesus in Luke 16 is speaking to fellow countrymen. He is addressing the Pharisees who are sneering at him—"And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him" (vs. 14 kjv). They could not imagine that they themselves were in any danger of

hell. Even when they saw Lazarus raised from the dead, they continued their plotting to kill the Lord Jesus Christ.

This rich man, then, grew up in the synagogue, memorizing the Scripture, hearing it week by week. But he never obeyed it, nor did he love it. He found it boring. He never dreamed for a moment that he would end up in hell. He never thought that one day there would be a great chasm fixed between himself and Abraham. There are many like him who hear the Word of God preached with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. Judas heard it; Ananias heard it; Sapphira heard it; Demas heard it; the Judaizers heard it—but all were lost.

Now you see what the rich man is saying from hell—"If the Scriptures are the only thing that you are going to give my brothers, well ... I had them, and what good did they do me? They didn't change me." In fact, he is saying in hell: "It is perfectly understandable that I didn't believe and that they don't believe—all we had was the Bible. I know my brothers; I am aware how they live; I know where they are going. The Bible is not going to touch them—men like them need something more." In effect, he is saying, "I should be excused. If only I had seen a miracle that thrilled me, I would have believed. If only a man had been raised from the dead and

spoken to me, then I would have paid attention. If only I could have gone to a meeting where amazing things happened, it would have been different. But all I had was the Bible. The Bible!"

That is what many people say still. "You can't expect the world to be attracted by the Bible, by preaching the Scriptures, by texts outside chapels, and verses on billboards, and tracts with Scriptures on them, and memorizing the Bible, and lessons from the Bible to children in Sunday school, and camps where young people are taught the Bible, and conferences where the Bible is proclaimed. You can't expect people to be attracted by that! We need concerts! We need drama! We need costumes! We need bands! We need choreography! Bring in the drums and the synthesizers. Send in the clowns! Then the people will come. We need superstars and celebrities to give us their testimonies—not just the Bible alone!" But, you see, Abraham was unyielding. "The Bible is sufficient," he said.

### **IS THE BIBLE ENOUGH?**

Not a few religious people argue just like that man from hell. The Roman Catholic Church says that the Bible is not enough, that we must have sacred tradition, too. The Quakers say that the Bible is not enough, that there must be an inner voice in

the congregation. Modernists say that Scripture itself is not enough, that it must be interpreted by "the assured results of modern criticism." They say that we must go back to sources "behind" our present gospel narratives to find the "authentic" sayings of Jesus. Cultists say that the Bible is not enough, that men must obey another book—the *Book of Mormon*, or *Science and Health with a Key to the Scriptures*, by Mary Baker Eddy, or the Watchtower productions of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Many charismatics say that the Bible is not enough, that it needs to be supplemented by miracles and signs. All such people are saying that the Bible is not enough. They say, "It's a good start, but it needs a bit of help from us."

A preacher has written that when the apostle Paul was preaching in Athens, he slipped up and as a result few were converted. Paul used wrong methods; he simply preached the Word of God to the philosophers who were gathered there on Mars Hill, and only a few were converted. So Paul went to Corinth and drastically changed his methods. There he performed miracles, and many were converted. But the conversion of one of the members of the Greek supreme court named Dionysius, and a woman named Damaris, as well as a number of other people (Acts 17:34) would be considered by us to be very encouraging for the first meeting in a community



that had never heard the gospel before. But people are taught that this is not "power evangelism." "Unless we can do miracles, there will be no converts."

"No, father Abraham," says the man in hell, "not the Bible alone—the Bible *plus* something else. The Bible plus informal entertainment. The Bible plus background music. You choose the "plus." You enthuse about it. You give lectures about it, and write books about it. You can grow rich on it—"How I found the plus that helps the inadequate Bible." You can hold seminars and conferences and tell the world the method that you discovered to compensate for the failure of the Scriptures. You can be like this man in hell who had no love for God, but thought of a way to make up for the inadequacies of the Bible.

Now remember that Abraham was in heaven before Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. Abraham had a unique perspective on the books of Moses and the Prophets. Abraham was there in the presence of God when the Lord gave the Word to Moses and to the prophets. He was listening to the Lord on those occasions when God commanded the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of illumination, "Go to Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and assist them to understand my Word, proclaim it, and write the Scriptures, to

the very jots and tittles." Abraham heard God speak, and he knew the source and power of that which had come from the throne of the universe. From the lips of the living God had come those words. Abraham knew and loved them: they were Spirit and life. They were powerful words, as effectual as when God had said "Let there be light" and there was light. The Almighty has broken the silence of the heavens. God has spoken to sinners. He has opened his heart and revealed his inmost Being. He is there and he is not silent. We have his Word.

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Heb. 1:1-2 KJV). He is a speaking God, but now in these last days he has spoken by his Son—the Lord from heaven, the speaking Savior, the Prophet, God's final Word. The Lord Christ has said that no one knows the Father except the Son, who alone has that infinite acquaintance. There is the immensity of the Almighty, and only the Son knows him comprehensively. When at the end of his life he is praying, he thanks the Father for all the help that he has had to discharge the commission which the Father gave him. He has omitted nothing, and when Jesus sends his

apostles into the world, he gives them the Holy Spirit to lead them into all the truth, and they also omit nothing. Everything has been provided for all that is needed for the over two thousand years of church history. When Paul acknowledges himself as an apostle, he says, "And then last of all to me also" (1 Cor. 15:8). In other words, Paul was the last apostle. No more apostles are needed. No house needs more than one solid foundation (Eph. 2:20).

We have Moses, we have the Prophets, we have the Gospels, and we have the Epistles. We have them all in our own English language. We may hold them in our hands, and we can read them. When John Jewel, one of the great English Reformers, who became the bishop of Salisbury, was preaching on the Scriptures, he ended by rousing his congregation: "Are you a father? Have you children? Read the Scriptures. Are you a king? Read the Scriptures. Are you a minister? Read the Scriptures. Has God blessed you with wealth? Read the Scriptures. Are you a usurer? Read the Scriptures. Are you a fornicator? Read the Scriptures. Are you in adversity? Read the Scriptures. Are you a sinner? Have you offended God? Read the Scriptures. Do you despair of the mercy of God? Read the Scriptures. Are you going out of this life? Read the Scriptures."

Abraham was saying words to this effect: "Do you want your brothers to see a miracle? Your brothers have got a miracle! They have in their hearing at every visit to the synagogue Moses and the Prophets. They may purchase for themselves Moses and the Prophets. They may read and memorize Moses and the Prophets."

We who live twenty centuries later have more, having the Gospels, the Acts, the Letters, and the book of Revelation. These new covenant writings are the miracle which leads the church into the new millennium. When I take this Bible in my hand, I am holding a mighty work of God. I have something absolutely unique. Here is something miraculous in its independence of thought, in the comprehensiveness of its theme, in its utter and invincible confidence that it is the most relevant word to my own life and to that of every man. Sometimes, in moments of doubt, our minds must rest in this: "I have the Bible." I have this great intrusion from heaven, this book that comes from another world in which men may hear the unique utterances of the Son of God. I have read much of human literature at its best, but I find here in this book something that is discontinuous with everything else. Here is a book that is absolutely unique. The Bible is a word from God that knows me, that describes me, that searches me, that finds

me. The Scripture speaks to man's deepest needs. Here is a book that contains concepts of unsurpassable grandeur, in words that are invincible in their sheer originality. Every Sunday, when gospel churches meet, they do so around this miracle. Every single service has at its center this miracle—not just those red letter Sundays, when everything is just right. Not merely when the Holy Spirit moves and convicts, but every time we are gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and this book is in the center of our gathering, then we are meeting in the presence of a miracle. Do you say you want a miracle and then you will believe? Well, here is a miracle! Abraham says "No!" to signs and wonders as the means of saving sinners today, because here is the Bible and it *is* a miracle. "So then, faith comes by hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

Abraham knew that this was God's method. So then, you must go to a church where there is a man sent to preach the word of Christ. That has been and always will be the means of saving anyone. Not since the apostolic age has a single person come to faith in Christ through seeing someone raised from the dead, but millions have become believers through hearing the word. Abraham knew that all the children who were there with him in the presence of God had been saved through the Bible, and

that the millions more who would join him there would get to heaven in the same way. It was the Scriptures which made them all "wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15 NKJV). God in mercy has said, "I have as many people coming into the kingdom as the sand on the seashore—they are all going to share heaven with me. They are corrupted rebels. They provoke me dreadfully, but I will forgive their sins, and I will do this for all who believe in Jesus Christ. And this will be my way: by bringing my word to them. I will send them a Christian neighbor. I will put them in a university, and there they will meet witnessing students. I will work through a member of their family, or through the woman who works in that office with them. And I will bring them all to a congregation where they will hear the Word of God preached. That is the way I will rescue them from hell. They don't have to be scholars to understand the Scriptures, but I will open their understanding to know the way of salvation through faith in Christ as that is found so plainly in the Bible. "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple" (Ps. 19:7 KJV). Ordinary folk can read or hear this message of the gospel and understand it. It tells us that we deserve eternal hell because we are sinners, but that Jesus, because he loved us, died to save us. We have God's message. If men will not listen to it, they will not be convinced even if God should change teeth fillings from amalgam to gold.

The Scriptures are sufficient to make the man of God perfect. How far can the Scriptures take you? They can take you to total maturity, that is, to be "thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17 NKJV). What lies before us? What duties, challenges, and sacrifices will we be called upon to accept? The Bible will completely equip us for them. How can we grow and put away childish things? How can we become mature men and women? How can we become wise? How can we become conformed to the image of Christ? Through the Bible—that is God's way. The Scripture sanctifies and perfects what is imperfect. It thoroughly enables us for the challenge of every good work in whatever God asks us to do. Every mountain God asks us to climb, every burden he asks us to bear, every service he asks us to give, every pressure he asks us to endure, every sacrifice he asks us to make—the Scriptures can enable us to do it all by preparing us comprehensively for every good work. They tell us *how* to do it and *why* we should do it; they give us *strength* for the task and warn us how *not* to do it. The Scriptures will complete that good work which God has begun in us. The Bible helps us to put away childish things. The Bible saves a man from being a wimp and delivers him from being a nerd. It transforms him into being "the man of God ... thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17 NKJV). It is a supernatural blessing to have the Bible.

Our Lord Jesus Christ ends the Sermon on the Mount by speaking about a wise man who built his house upon a rock. And the storms, winds, and floods came, and the house still stood. That man was building his life on the teaching of the Lord Jesus and it stood. Christ was looking forward down the centuries, even looking into the hideous modern era in which we have lived for so long. Christ knew all the storms that would be hurled at little Christian boys or girls; the gales of scientific pretension, of philosophy and humanism, of materialism and fleshliness. Yet every young Christian who stands on the teaching of Jesus will survive any storm. The Savior is absolutely confident about it.

The professing church is in a hopeless, demoralized state whenever its members begin to believe that the Bible is insufficient for the task before us. The Roman Catholic Church, the Quakers, the modernists, the cults, and the charismatics are all looking for some additional signs and voices. None of them is in a healthy state. None of them is convinced about the sufficiency of God's truth. The issue confronting you is, Are you content with the Bible or not?

*The author is the pastor of Alfred Place Baptist Church in Aberystwyth, Wales. Unless otherwise indicated, he provides*



*his own Bible translations. Reprinted from New Horizons,  
January 2002.*

[Archived Feature Articles](#)

[Return to Formatted Page](#)

Copyright © 2010, The Orthodox Presbyterian Church. All Rights Reserved.