

## Letters From a Skeptic Lessons 6-7: The Bible

*“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness...”*

2 Tim 3:16



*“Salvation is a matter of being related to Christ, not the Bible.”*

### Correspondence 13: “Why trust the Gospel accounts?”

**Father** < pp. 94-95 >

1. The heart of his problem: *“Christians... are always quoting the Bible to back up their beliefs. They justify their beliefs as absolute truths because ‘the Bible tells me so.’”*
2. *“It just doesn’t cut any mustard with me because I don’t accept the Bible in the first place.”*

**Son** < pp. 95-105; (read 95-98, summarize 98-104, read 105) >

1. The son begins to focus primarily on **Jesus and the NT gospels**
2. *“...God’s existence is the standard for perfect love, knowledge, and moral conviction.”*
3. *“...you assumed that I was just referring to the Bible as ‘God’s Word’ when I referred to Jesus being Lord, but I wasn’t... I’m referring to them merely as historical documents.”*
4. *“Apply to [the Gospels] the same criteria historians apply to other ancient documents... my contention is that when [they] are treated in this critical-historical way, they fare very well and can be trusted to tell us a good deal about the person of Jesus Christ, enough, in fact, to know that God was present in Him and working through Him in a most significant way.”*
5. Summary of criteria for determining the accuracy of historical documents
  - a. Was the author an eyewitness? Were eyewitness accounts used?
  - b. Does document contain irrelevant material? (if so, this is good)
  - c. Does document contain self-damaging material? (if so, this is good)
  - d. Is the document self-consistent?
  - e. Legendary accretion? (story grows more exaggerated over time)
  - f. Does the author have an agenda, or more interested in truth?
  - g. Other sources that confirm the document’s contents?
  - h. Supported by archeology?
  - i. Could the author’s contemporaries have shown the document to be false?
6. *“So to sum it all up, Dad, I think we have very good grounds for treating the Gospels like generally reliable documents. They are generally good sources of history for us. And this has nothing to do with them being ‘inspired’ or ‘God’s Word’: it is just history.”*
7. *“In the face of this history, one must make a decision.”*
8. **Comments?** (Note, he doesn’t say the Bible isn’t ‘God’s Word’ but only that it doesn’t have to be to be considered as accurate today as when it was written.)

Start w/ quick summary and move to items 6-8.

Note how son focuses dad on the need for a “decision.”

Great discussion topic!

*“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness...”*

2 Tim 3:16

*“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.”*

Mark 13:31

*“...no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”*

2 Pet 1:21

*“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*

Heb 4:12

## Correspondence 14: “Aren’t the Gospels full of contradictions?”

### Father <pp. 106-107>

1. *“I don’t see how anyone can base their faith on how well a certain document meets historical criteria because all of it is guess work, nothing is certain.”*
2. *“It’s also said that the Gospels are full of contradictions, that the order of events is arranged all differently, that the teachings of Jesus are found in different contexts, and the like.”*
3. *“Even if the Gospels are accurate at points... it doesn’t mean they’re completely accurate.”*
4. *“It’s nothing I’d want to stake my life on.”*

*“...holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.”*

Phil 2:16

*“...and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”*

2 Tim 3:15

### Son <pp. 108-111>

1. *“My faith doesn’t hang on the demonstrable credibility of these documents in every detail, but it does hang on their overall credibility.”*
2. *“[The Gospels] were written to save people by bringing them into a relationship with the Savior.”*
3. *“Almost all of the alleged ‘contradictions’ in the Gospels are the result of people misusing the Gospels, treating them like 20<sup>th</sup>-century works which work under a ‘snapshot-tape recording’ criteria of truth. But if they are read in accordance with their first century context and the purpose for which they are written, the ‘contradictions’ disappear. Not because they are explained away, but because they instantly become totally irrelevant.”*
4. *“Dad, I stand by my claim that the Gospels are trustworthy. They tell us all we need to know and thus force us to answer an all-important question: who was Jesus Christ? And with this question comes a **decision**: was He a lunatic, was He a liar, or was He the Lord His followers proclaimed Him to be?”* (emphasis mine)
  - a. The son gently but continuously reminds his father that there is a decision to be made.
5. *“Whether you like it or not, you should know that I’m praying a lot for you.”*

**Q:** How do your non-Christian friends/family respond when you say you’re praying for them?

The discussion topics just jump off the page!

Excellent rationale and defense of the Gospel.

## Correspondence 15: “Who wrote the Gospels, and when?”

Probably  
won't have  
time for this.

<We're going to skim this one. Encourage the class to fully read this on their own.>

### **Father <pg. 112-113>**

1. “I’m surprised to hear you conceding that the Gospels have all these differences, that they used previous sources, etc.”
2. “How can you be sure when these books were written... and who wrote them?”
3. “Maybe they’ve been ‘doctored up’ along the way.”

### **Son <pp. 113-120>**

1. This letter contains a great treatment of dating and authorship
  - a. Due to time constraints, we’ll read first three paragraphs on pg. 113-114 and the third-to-last paragraph on page 119.
2. “*Salvation is a matter of being related to Christ, not the Bible. In fact, believing the Bible to be inspired is, for me, simply a consequence (not the basis) of confessing Christ to be the Lord of my life.*”
3. He points out that the key to dating the Gospel is dating the book of Acts.
4. “*Dad, you and I have gotten to the point in our discussion where we’ve agreed that God does exist, and that He is a personal being who knows, loves, and cares about us more than we could care ourselves. So the question I pose to you is this: doesn’t this testimony of the Gospels ‘fit’? Doesn’t the proclamation that ‘in Christ God was redeeming the world’ (2 Cor. 5:19, my paraphrase) not only square with the historical evidence, but square with this view of God as well? Doesn’t this proclamation confirm the longings of the heart in the same fashion it answers the questions of the mind? I hope you think about it, and (who knows?) maybe even pray about it.*”
  - a. Note how he encourages the dad to try praying.

**Homework:** Read Correspondence 16 and Correspondence 17.