

THE BIBLE

II TIMOTHY 3:16-17

The Bible Is the Foundation and Final Authority by Which Christians Conduct Their Lives

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The Bible

II Timothy 3:16-17

I have only once preached topically and that was when we went through the Purpose Driven Life series. However, it occurred to me during this last year that there seems to be some confusion over some of the basic doctrines of Christianity. And so I am going to preach topically through the end of the year. I will deal with topics such as the Bible, Sin and Salvation, Who God is, and who we are before and after we came to know Christ, and our pursuit of holiness.

This morning I would like to start with the Bible since the Bible is our primary and only reliable source of truth for living the Christian life.

I know this sounds like a bold and overdramatic statement but I'm quite sure it is true. Most people who claim to be Christian do not read and study their Bibles on a regular basis. And since they don't read and study their Bibles, it is impossible for them to grow and mature. Further, they will develop bad theology, live immature lifestyles, and perhaps find themselves in hell for eternity. Without regular Bible reading and study, there can be no authentic Christianity.

My feeling is that people just pick and choose when they read the Bible and selectively apply it. I was spending a week with some friends and I heard the husband and wife arguing about who would make the coffee. The husband said, "Honey, why don't you make the coffee?" to which the wife responded, "Why don't you make the coffee?" The husband said, "I'm the man and I do the outside work. You're the woman. You should cook and clean and making coffee is cooking, therefore your job."

What happened next I wasn't ready for. The wife said, "It's in the Bible that you should make the coffee. It is a biblical principle that husbands make coffee." "Now where do you get that?" asked the husband. I was curious so I got up and went to the kitchen. The wife appeared with a Bible in her hands and handed it to her husband. She said to her husband, "Can you read for me what is written at the top of each of these 18 pages?" Reluctantly, the husband said, "He-brews." The wife said, "I rest my case."

We think that's funny, but many people who claim to be Christians use the Bible in this manner.

We are a Bible-believing church and our church's statement of faith states that clearly, "We believe the Holy Scriptures to be the inspired Word of God, inerrant, absolutely authoritative, and infallible." To be sure, there are churches that claim to be Christian that do not have a high view of Scripture. However, Devon Church is committed to operating and living according to the Word of God. The main idea for this morning's text is this. **THE BIBLE IS THE FOUNDATION AND FINAL AUTHORITY BY WHICH CHRISTIANS CONDUCT THEIR LIVES.** I know this is confusing because we live in a society that affirms everyone's belief system as valid as another's. That's okay for society. However, for Christians, there is only one legitimate source of truth, the Bible.

I. GOD'S WORD (16a)

God Is The Author Of The Bible.

The first half of verse 16 states that the Bible is God's Word. The reason that the Bible is like no other book is because **GOD IS THE AUTHOR OF THE BIBLE.**

A. ALL OF THE BIBLE

God is the author of the entire Bible from Genesis thru Revelation. Every word is from God. Look how verse 16 starts out. The first two words are, "All Scripture." Did you hear that? Before we get further into this, I need to point out that the Bible points to other sorts of God's revelation.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul pointed out that God has revealed Himself in nature. The problem with God's revelation in nature is that it may be open to all sorts of misunderstanding. For example, many cultures actually start to worship nature when the clear intent of God was that nature point to the God of creation. The Bible also tells us that God speaks through prophecy. The problem with prophets is that there are true prophets, but there are also false prophets. And most importantly, God revealed Himself through the person and life of Jesus. However, Jesus is longer with us in the flesh. We are left today with the written Word of God. When we look for God's revelation in nature, we now have the Bible to guide us to the right interpretation of His revelation in nature. When prophets speak, their message is required to be measured according to the truths of Scripture. If the prophet's message does not agree with the Bible, it is a false prophecy. And the Bible faithfully records the life, time, works, and person of Jesus Christ. There is no other reliable source that can help us find salvation and a map for holy living.

The word used for Scripture here in Greek simply means writings. These writings include all of our Old and New Testaments. I have had people come to me and say, "That's the Old Testament." If I'm not mistaken, according to this passage and many others, the entire Bible is the Word of God. I have discovered that people often latch on to one or two verses, or one or two concepts and let them drive their lives. However, if they just read Scripture a little more carefully, they could see how faulty their theology is. Let me give you a quick example. People picture Jesus as meek and mild. He is gracious and forgiving. He reaches out to sinners. All that is true ... but it is not the complete story. Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He will judge the living and the dead. He will cast people into hell for an eternity. To focus only on one aspect of Jesus' personality is to have a wrong view of Jesus. It is important to read and understand the entire Bible. If you have been with me from the start of my ministry here at Devon, you know that I preach from all parts of the Bible. Since coming to Devon, I have preached through 36 books of the Bible. I have preached from each section of the Old Testament; the Torah, the history books, the poetic books and the prophets. From the New Testament, I have preached from the Gospels, the history book, the Pauline letters, Peter's letters, John, James, and Jude's letters, Hebrews and Revelation. All these books are God's written Word to us. None should be ignored because they are all Scripture.

B. IS GOD-BREATHED

And that brings us to the next point. All Scripture is God-breathed. I'm glad the NIV uses the word God-breathed. Many versions use the word inspired. Inspired is an okay word but it leaves room for misinterpretation. Inspired does mean breathed into. However, a muse could inspire people, a man or woman could inspire someone. That would again put the emphasis on a person or a thing. The Greek leaves no room for misunderstanding. It is God Who breathed the Bible. There is a lot of theological discussion as to how God inspired the Bible. Some say he dictated it word for word. However, it seems what God did was take individuals and speak to them according to their vocabulary, their style, their culture, and their experiences. God spoke to people for the purpose of writing Scripture from as far back as 1500 B.C. to 90 A.D. He used educated people, fishermen, farmers, and doctors. He used Jews and Gentiles alike. And yet the promise and the message of the Bible are consistent throughout. The Bible is God's authoritative Word to us because **GOD IS THE AUTHOR OF THE BIBLE.**

II. GOD'S TOOL (16b)

The Bible Is God's Instructional Manual That Trains Us to Be Holy.

God did not inspire the Bible just to give us some interesting reading. The second half of verse 16 reminds us that the Bible is God's tool. **THE BIBLE IS GOD'S INSTRUCTIONAL MANUAL**

THAT TRAINS US TO BE HOLY. In other words, God gave us the Bible to show us how to become Christians. We find God's way for us to be saved and rescued from spending an eternity in hell. God's plan of salvation is spelled out clearly in the Bible. Further, God reveals to us in the Bible what He expects from us and how He expects us to behave.

A. USEFUL

First of all the Bible is useful. The word here in Greek refers to profit. In other words, the Bible is meant to enrich our lives. Since we live in such a materialistic society, it is good that Paul goes on to inform us how God enriches our lives through the Bible.

B. TEACHING

We profit by the Bible through its teaching. This refers to doctrine. In other words, the Bible teaches us who we are and what we were created to be. It teaches us that because of sin, we have become enemies of God. Further the Bible teaches us Who God is. It teaches us of God's provision through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus how we can be right with Him. The Bible teaches us what is right and wrong and how we can fulfill God's plan for our lives. It is important to study and formulate doctrine and theology from the Bible because it gives us a guide for life.

C. REBUKING

Next the Bible enriches our lives by rebuking us. In the Bible, rebuking refers to showing people their sins so they can repent and get things right with God. The secular definition of this word in Greek meant to investigate, to bring to light, to expose, to scorn, blame, shame, and to hold in contempt. Some of that is applicable to the Bible's definition. In other words, as we read the Bible, the Holy Spirit searches our hearts and reveals to us sin that is not consistent for people who call themselves Christians. As we humbly read and study the Bible, while listening for God's Holy Spirit, we are made aware of our sin. This should lead us to genuine sorrow that leads to genuine repentance that in turn leads to changed thoughts and behavior. The more we allow the Scripture rebuke us, the richer our lives become in Christ.

D. CORRECTING

The next way God's Word enriches our lives is through correction. I want to say this Greek word out loud because it will give us a rich view of what is envisioned here. The word is *epan-orthosis*. Did you hear the word *orthos* in that word? We get our word orthopedic and orthotics from this word. The word *orthos* in Greek meant to stand upright and to move in a straight line. With the prefix, it means to restore to an upright state, to put back on a straight line, or in a very basic sense mean to bring someone to salvation. Where the rebuking job of the Scripture was to make us aware of our sin, the correcting work of the Scripture is to help us get back on track, to stand up straight and walk in a straight line.

E. TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

And the Bible enriches our lives by training us in righteousness. This phrase "training in righteousness" is rich with meaning. First of all, let me give just a simple explanation of what it means. The Bible teaches us to think and to do the right thing. Now let me take us deeper into the meaning. Let's start with the word righteousness. Righteousness for Christians means that we conform to the image, nature, and character of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every day that goes by, we should become more and more like Jesus. We should start to think and act more like Jesus. Our thoughts and behavior should be consistent with Jesus. Jesus made us righteous

when He died in our place and applied His righteousness to us by grace when we placed our faith and trust in Him. So in one sense we are already righteous in God's eyes. But we are commanded to pursue lives of righteousness based on the fact that Jesus has made us righteous. In other words, we are to be disciples of Christ.

Now let's look at the word for training. The word has to do with the upbringing of a child. In the ancient Greek and Roman world, each child was assigned a personal tutor. Oftentimes the tutor was a well educated and highly trusted slave. This tutor would walk the child to school and pick him up. The tutor would help the child do his or her homework. Further, the tutor would educate the child to the good experiences of life to embrace and the bad experiences to avoid. This tutor would stay with the child until he or she became an adult. For Christians, we would call this discipleship. It is important that all Christians be in a discipleship relationship no matter how mature we think we are. But the most important point of discipleship is that it is based on the Bible. If we are not discipling or being disciplined in the Bible, then the discipleship is worthless. The Bible is to be the guide that leads us in the paths of righteousness. Just sitting around talking is not discipleship. If we want to be enriched in our lives, it is absolutely clear here that the Bible, the entire Bible is to be the source. Any other form or type is useless. There is to be no doubt about this point. The Bible is God's tool. **THE BIBLE IS GOD'S INSTRUCTIONAL MANUAL THAT TRAINS US TO BE HOLY.**

III. GOD'S PURPOSE FOR US (17)

Our Only Legitimate Purpose for Living is to find and Accomplish God's will For Our Lives.

Verse 17 reminds us that the Bible reveals God's purpose for us. **OUR ONLY LEGITIMATE PURPOSE FOR LIVING IS TO FIND AND ACCOMPLISH GOD'S WILL FOR OUR LIVES.** I really think this is hard for me to keep in mind. I have so many things I enjoy in life. In fact, life has been so good to me that I often forget my purpose for living. To be sure, I am very thankful to God. I really do believe that I am not entitled to a thing and yet God continues to give me an incredibly enjoyable life. And I do live thankful for everything.

However, I enjoy life so much that I sometimes forget to consciously seek out God's will for my life. God gave us the Bible to teach us, rebuke us, correct us and train us in righteousness so that we will be equipped.

A. EQUIPPED

Every man and woman of God is supposed to be equipped, thoroughly equipped. It's hard to get the precise meaning of this phrase. I'm not even sure how to literally translate it in Greek. But the meaning is something like this. It means perfectly prepared and exactly suited for. If we are truly Christian, then the Bible refers to us as saints. In other words, we are set apart specifically to do God's will. Through our life experiences, education, culture, etc. God is perfectly preparing us. However, all these things have to be put together and evaluated under the authority of Scripture. Just because we have had a life experience, it doesn't qualify us for a thing. We must be immersed in God's Word. Then He can use our experiences, etc.

B. TO DO GOOD WORKS

So what is God perfectly preparing us for and what exactly are we suitably prepared for? We are being prepared for every good work. I think we have to stop and define what "good" is here. First of all Jesus made it clear that no one is good except God. Good is not defined by society or culture. In other words, being a good American does not make one a good Christian. I may have military and civilian awards, but they don't make me good.

Belonging to the VFW or doing things for cultural organizations may be noble and helpful, but they are not considered good according to Bible standards. Good works are to be judged as good only by the Bible and God's standards. We have somehow come to think we have the freedom to decide what's good and what we will do. Let me quote a passage that I have been running across lately and quoting a lot. It comes from Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

"⁸God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. ¹⁰For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago" (Ephesians 2:8-10 / NLT).

Sometimes I think that Christians separate their salvation from the rest of their lives. We often look at salvation as fire insurance. In other words, I was headed for hell, I placed my faith in Christ, and now I'm saved. Now that's done, I can go on with my life.

However, if we take time to look at this passage, Paul ties our salvation to our lifestyle, which is focused on finding and accomplishing the good works God has prepared for us. I hope we never miss this point. We were saved for a purpose and that purpose is to accomplish predestined good works. Salvation is a free gift. But this gift is not given to us so we can go away and do what we want. I have recently referred to the story of the Prodigal Son. He took his inheritance and went away to spend it on selfish living. If we think in any way that now that we are saved we are free to do anything we want, then we are just like the Prodigal Son. At the turning point of the story, the Bible says the Prodigal Son came to his senses. In other words, if we are not consciously looking for God's predestined good works for us and accomplishing them, then we are living selfishly and insanely.

Here is the point. Let me focus on the phrase "we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." God has been preparing us through the Bible and through all of our life experiences. The more we read and study, the more perfectly prepared we will be. At the same time, God is preparing people and situations to intersect with our lives at a particular place and time. These people and situations can be ministered to only by us. God prepared us. He prepared these people and situations. He prepared for us to meet up at a particular place and time. Perhaps the person needs money and food and God has given us money and means to help. Perhaps a person has experienced a life trauma that we understand and can minister to through God's Word.

IV. EPILOGUE

I know for me, and I'm guessing for many of you, this is all about a change in a paradigm for living and for outlook. In other words, I should be reading and studying Scripture regularly. During the day, I should be meditating on it. But most of all, I should be open to God bringing people and situations into my life where I can minister. It's not just about going around doing stuff, even religious stuff. It's about looking for God's predestination playing itself out in our lives. As we become more attuned to God's will for our lives through studying our Bibles, the more useful we become to God and His Kingdom. Paul stated this attitude in his letter to the Romans:

"¹And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask? ²Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is" (Romans 12:1-2 / NLT).

I know that I forget this way too often but I hope I will remember it and consciously embrace it more and more each day. **OUR ONLY LEGITIMATE PURPOSE FOR LIVING IS TO FIND AND ACCOMPLISH GOD'S WILL FOR OUR LIVES.**

I know that we think we are wise in our own eyes and sometimes I think that because we are successful in our careers and other endeavors, we often make decisions based on our own wisdom without submitting to the truths of Scripture. Or perhaps we find ourselves submitting the truths of Scripture to the wisdom of the world. However the truth for Christians is this. **THE BIBLE IS THE FOUNDATION AND FINAL AUTHORITY BY WHICH CHRISTIANS CONDUCT THEIR LIVES.**

I don't know why, but this passage of Scripture has been coming to mind lately. I have talked about it and I have quoted it often. Listen to what God tells Joshua right before he embarks on conquering the Promised Land:

⁶"Be strong and courageous, for you will lead my people to possess all the land I swore to give their ancestors. ⁷Be strong and very courageous. Obey all the laws Moses gave you. Do not turn away from them, and you will be successful in everything you do. ⁸Study this Book of the Law continually. Meditate on it day and night so you may be sure to obey all that is written in it. Only then will you succeed. ⁹I command you—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:6-9 / NLT).

I'd like to say something clever, but there are no shortcuts to living lives that are pleasing to God and there is only one source of absolute truth by which to measure all things:

¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (II Timothy 3:16-17 / NIV).