

## ***The Authority of Scripture***

### ***2 Timothy 3:14-17***

I'm thinking of two people I know really well. Neither of these people live in Kansas, so rest assured that I'm not talking about any of you. One of these people is a **great** listener; and the other one, not so much.

This one man is very, very attentive when we talk. He has this posture of interest and curiosity. He often gets clarification to make sure he's heard me correctly. "Now are you saying *this*?" "Let me understand you here. . ." I remember one time in a phone call he made an observation about something I had said a couple of weeks earlier. It was obvious that he had been thinking about (and maybe even praying about) what I had said. Guess how that made me feel. I felt heard and understood; actually, I felt loved.

The other man hears me when we talk. And I know he loves me. But I'm not sure he really "gets" me. Consequently, I'm pretty cautious about what I say and how I say it when I'm around him.

I'm sure you can think of two analogous people in your life. The dynamic at play is that ***we care deeply what other people do with our words***. That's because our words come from our hearts (and we care what people do with our hearts).

I say all of this because throughout the Bible we are told in various ways that ***God cares deeply what we do with HIS words recorded in Scripture***. He wants us to listen to what he has to say. He wants us to think about and talk about what he has to say. He ultimately wants us to be doers of his words. This has been a problem throughout history. Adam and Eve disregarded what God told them. In the wilderness God put the children of Israel in situations that should have made clear that they don't live by bread/food alone, but by every word that comes out of his mouth; but they didn't learn. In Isaiah God told the prophet that he could speak to the people, but they wouldn't understand; they were dull of hearing. Finally at the end of the book of Isaiah, God says:

2 . . . But this is the one to whom I will look:  
he who is humble and contrite in spirit  
and trembles at my word.

God says, "this is the person I will give my full attention. . ." the person who trembles at his word (the fear of the Lord). This is one of the core ways that we love God: by taking seriously and hanging on his every word in Scripture.

But how can we become people who are passionate about hearing God's voice through the Scriptures? One place to begin is to have the same view of Scripture that it has for itself, the same view that Jesus himself had of Scripture, the same view that Paul had.

Beginning this morning we are taking a four-week break from our series in the book of Acts to study four core attributes of Scripture that can help us become passionate about God's Word. We're calling this series ***Formed by the Word***. It's not enough to have a

high view of Scripture, although that's essential. But the Pharisees had a high view of Scripture, but most of them missed God when he showed up in the flesh. We also need a deep experience with Scripture, so deep that it actually forms with way we think and feel and speak and act.

In this series we'll consider these four attributes of Scripture:

- \* The Authority of Scripture: it is final.
- \* The Necessity of Scripture: it is needed.
- \* The Sufficiency of Scripture: it is enough.
- \* The Clarity of Scripture: it is understandable.

These attributes should fuel our desire to ***be formed by the word***, allowing it to transform our lives (as it promises in many places to do)

Today we consider ***The Authority of Scripture*** from 2 Timothy 3:14-17. When we talk about the authority of Scripture, we mean that it is the final authority on every topic it addresses. Scripture doesn't address every area of knowledge in the universe (such as speech therapy or construction science). But on every topic it does address, Scripture has the final word. If you hold to the authority of Scripture, you will submit to what the Scriptures say about God, humanity, salvation, heaven and hell, human sexuality, relationships, compassion, anger, speech, etc.

If you hold to the authority of Scripture, you basically say, "The Bible is ***my*** final authority on everything it teaches. Therefore, I want to believe all that it teaches, obey all that it demands, and trust all that it promises." Whereas others view logic or tradition or culture or church experts as their authority, we view the Scriptures as our final authority.

Context. In the early part of 2 Timothy 3 Paul tells Timothy to anticipate how hard it will be for him to remain faithful to God and faithful to his calling as a pastor in Ephesus. He needed to understand that people will habitually love the wrong things: instead of loving God, they will love themselves, money, and pleasure; instead of living lives of gratitude and self-control, they will be erratic and impulsive and brutal.

In verse 13 Paul summarizes his point by saying that "evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." Just as in every generation, Timothy lived in a world in which some would increasingly live in ways that are opposed to God.

What is significant for our purposes in this message on the authority of Scripture is that for Paul ***the*** thing that would cause Timothy to remain faithful to God and his calling was to continue in the Scriptures. We learn three things about the authority of Scripture in today's passage.

***The authority of Scripture flows from its divine origin. (2 Timothy 3:16)***

In verse 16 Paul makes a very bold, visionary statement about Scripture. He, of course, was referring to the Hebrew Scriptures/writings (i.e., the Old Testament). But even in that generation, Peter (in 2 Peter 3) referred to Paul's writings as Scripture also. What is said here about the Hebrew Scriptures is true about all 66 books of the Bible.

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

The emphasis here is upon the origin of Scripture. All Scripture is breathed out by God; Scripture comes from the mouth of God. This means that God "exhaled Scripture" into the hearts and minds of human authors. They, led by the Holy Spirit, wrote down exactly what God desired to be communicated. Because Scripture is breathed out by God, it is authoritative. What Scripture says, God says.

This is how Jesus viewed the Hebrew Scriptures. In Matthew 19:4-5 when he quoted from Genesis 2, he didn't say, "Have you not read what Moses said. . ."; he said, "Have you not read what [God] said. . ." Both Paul and the author of Hebrews did the same thing (Romans 9:17, Hebrews 4:7). What Scripture says, God says. Because God has all authority, his word is authoritative. Scripture is the final word on every topic it addresses.

In this passage Paul tells Timothy that because Scripture is God-breathed and authoritative, it is sufficient and essential for salvation (coming to faith in Christ) and sanctification (growing in Christ) (or for life and for godliness - see 2 Peter 1:3).

***Scripture is our authority for salvation.*** (2 Timothy 3:14-15) In these verses, Paul tells Timothy that since the Scriptures had led him to Christ, he should continue in the Scriptures.

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it

Paul tells Timothy to "stay the course" when it comes to Scripture. The theological and spiritual truths had learned and become convinced of weren't outdated or obsolete. And he needed to remember that he'd been taught the Scriptures by credible people: his mother and grandmother and Paul himself. Timothy needed to continue in Scripture.

In verse 15 Paul mentions that the foundation of truth had been laid in Timothy's childhood.

15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Ever since Timothy was a child he had known "the sacred writings" (which was a way that Greek-speaking Jews commonly referred to the OT - Knight, NIGCT *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 443). The Hebrew Scriptures themselves claim to make a person wise. The

Scriptures have the power to “drive out the foolishness of unbelief” (as Andy Davis puts it).

Timothy grew up hearing that only a fool says in his heart “There is no God.” He grew up knowing that there is a God who had created the earth and everything in it. Timothy grew up hearing that sin must be atoned for through a blood sacrifice. And so when Paul arrived in Lystra (Acts 14) and explained that Jesus was God in the flesh and that his death was the once-and-for-all sacrifice for sin, Timothy believed. The Scriptures had prepared him to experience salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

The Scriptures are the God-given means of coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Parents, one of your top priorities should be to teach your children the Scriptures; they have an amazing capacity to learn and assimilate the Scriptures in ways that will bear fruit for the rest of their lives.

A few months ago I spent the night with my daughter Rose and her family in Andover. I was in the basement with my 5-year-old grandson Wyatt. And their dog (Cora the Sheltie) grabbed a pillow and began chewing on it. I took the pillow out of her mouth and swatted her with it; I thought that was an obvious thing to do since dogs shouldn't chew on pillows. But my grandson walked up to me and with great conviction said, “Grandpa, I don't think you were slow to anger with Cora.” Busted. I don't love being corrected by my 5-year-old grandson. But I do love that his mind is saturated with Scripture “which is able to make [him] wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.”

Scriptures is our authority on salvation. It is the final word on salvation. You will hear all sorts of things out in the world about salvation; the dominant view out there is that you really don't need to be saved from anything. The message seems to be, “Don't be an axe-murderer and if there's a heaven you will end up there.”

But Scripture is God-breathed and therefore authoritative. If you want to be saved from your sins, the best thing you can do is to become a good listener, hanging on the words that **God** has spoken about salvation. Scripture will diagnose your condition and convict you of your sinfulness at the heart level. And Scripture will show you how Jesus has paid for your sin by his sacrifice on the cross. Scripture will invite you to repent (turn from your sin in a decisive way) and turn to Jesus Christ in faith. Go to Scripture directly; read the Scriptures with a Christian or group of Christians that have experienced this salvation. We have lots of groups here at Faith; there are lots of great campus ministries who have groups that study the Bible.

***Scripture is our authority for sanctification.*** (2 Timothy 3:16-17) After coming to faith in Christ, the Scriptures are the final word on how to grow in holiness.

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

As you would expect, because Scripture is God-breathed, it is “profitable” in the sense of being “valuable, beneficial, and useful.” Paul mentions four ways that the whole of Scripture is profitable. Let’s consider each one briefly.

Scripture is profitable for **teaching**. Scripture has content that we need to know about God and about our relationship with Him. Since he wants to teach us through the Scriptures, we need to be **teachable** when we approach the Scriptures.

We should never come to Scripture with that mindset, assuming we’re not going to learn anything new; rather, we should show up assuming the opposite - that God wants to teach us things about which we are clueless. Since Scripture is profitable for teaching, we should show up teachable.

The second and third benefits of Scripture are complementary: Scripture is profitable for **reproof** and **correction**. Reproof (or rebuke) involves confronting things that need to change in our lives. And in a complementary way, the Scriptures are also profitable for **correction** - showing us the correct way to think and speak and act. Therefore we should come to the Scriptures assuming that there are things in our lives that need to be confronted and corrected. God is a good Father who disciplines us for our own good. He’s not a bully who forces us do what he wants because he’s bigger and stronger than us. No, like a good Father who is slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness, he disciplines us so that we might become more like him (Hebrews 12).

Finally, Scripture is profitable for **training in righteousness**. The Scriptures train or equip us to live rightly in our everyday behavior. Scripture isn’t merely pious platitudes; Scripture can equip us for real-life righteousness.

The net result of the profitability of Scripture is(verse 17) **that we are adequate, equipped for every good work**. Instead of continually being caught off guard and clueless in terms of how we should live and what we should do, we are prepared and equipped to live your life in a way that pleases God. **Scripture is our authority for sanctification**.

In light of everything we’ve discussed this morning I want to recommend a specific discipline to practice.

**A Discipline to Practice: Allow Psalm 119 to form the way you experience God through his Word.** Over the next month (the duration of this series), we’d like you to meditate on Psalm 119 in light of what we’re teaching each week. As you may know, Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in all of Scripture, having 176 verses. Psalm 119 has 22 stanzas; the first word in each stanza begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet (which has 22 letters). As an acrostic, Psalm 119 is about experiencing God through his Word “from A to Z.”

In light of today’s message on the authority of God’s word, approach Psalm 119 believing that it, along with other Scriptures, is the final word on how to approach God through Scripture. Whereas our culture and other people will tell you to approach God’s

Word with skepticism or doubt, Psalm 119 tells you to approach God's word with humility and faith and the fear of the Lord.

Psalm 119 is God-breathed and therefore authoritative and profitable. If you allow it to do so, you will experience the profitability of Scripture in all the ways we've talked about today. Let me give you three quick examples:

Profitable for teaching. Honestly, every verse in this psalm teaches something about how to experience God through his Word. One thing taught repeatedly in Psalm 119 is that God is the one who gives us understanding. Look at verse 18:

18 Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

This verse teaches us to cry out to God to open our eyes and give us understanding when we read the Scriptures. We invest time and energy reading and meditating on Scripture (see v. 11, for example); but God has to give us understanding. Therefore, we pray before reading Scripture.

Profitable for reproof and correction. Notice how verse 71 might be profitable in these ways:

71 It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.

You might read this and realize, "I've never thought that it was good for me that I was afflicted. . ." Maybe when you're suffering, you tend to accuse God of not being kind or good. Or maybe you trend toward self-pity. This verse is an implicit rebuke of that attitude.

And it also gives a correct attitude, namely, remaining teachable because sometimes afflictions provide the context for learning lessons from Scripture that we might not otherwise learn.

Profitable for training in righteousness. Notice what verse 136 says about real-life righteousness.

136 My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.

Scripture mentions other valid responses when we look around and see how people (including us!) fail to live according to Scripture. For example, sometimes we're in a place to correct (humbly and gently) a person who has strayed from Scripture. But this verse gives us another aspect of a right/righteous response: shedding streams of tears. . . over the devastation sin brings into people's lives and over the sorrow it brings to the heart of God.

I hope these examples illustrate how we welcome the profitability of Scripture since it is **the** authority on everything it addresses.

Our encouragement is to read and think about a portion of Psalm 119 daily (if you can) for the next four weeks. You can read Psalm 119 alongside your normal Bible reading each day (if that's already your habit). By God's grace, what you will find is that after four weeks of soaking in Psalm 119 consistently and thoughtfully, you will find that you are learning to "tremble at God's Word." This will be for your good and God's glory.