

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (13-4-1997 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Additional Bible reading: Psalm 119:97-112

Introduction

Having spoken of the Holy Scriptures which are able to make us wise unto salvation through Christ, Paul now goes on to expound and tell us something about the nature, purpose and sufficiency of Scripture. Initially he is speaking of the Old Testament. But if the preliminary revelation and covenant of God in the Old Testament is of this nature, how much more is it true of the fulfilment in the New Testament with the eternal and present covenant.

The problem with dealing with this subject is that some have been brought up to regard Scripture as the Word of God and that is the end of it. They do not question the matter. They see no need to go into the things mentioned here. But others, and not least thinking young people, are bursting with questions which demand an answer. We need to cater for both groups now.

The nature of Scripture

The Bible is different from every other book. It was inspired by God in a unique way. θεοπνευστος means “breathed out by God”, i.e. expiration rather than inspiration is a suitable term. **Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit** (2 Peter 1:21). In the Old Testament, over 3000 times the writers say they are writing what the Lord says. The Lord Himself regarded the Old Testament as God’s Word. **Scripture cannot be broken** (John 10:35), He said. Often He started His speech with “It is written” (Matthew 4, Luke 4). He trusted it, obeyed it, fulfilled it, used it when He was tempted, and it was on His lips as He was dying on the Cross.

At the same time, He made provision for the New Testament. He promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles. **The Holy Spirit will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you** (John 14:26). **The Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth** (John 16:13). And it is noteworthy that all the Apostles, as they wrote their letters, wrote in the name of and with the authority of Christ, and call their message the “Word of God” (2 Corinthians 2:17; 2 Corinthians 13:3; Galatians 4:14; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Peter 3:16). Peter clearly regards Paul’s letters as Scriptures, on the same level as the Old Testament.

So the Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are God-breathed. They originated in God’s mind, were communicated from God’s mouth by God’s Spirit, and can rightly be called “the Word of God”. But be careful here. Inspiration does not mean the Bible was dropped down from heaven complete with black covers and gilt edging. It is also a human book, written by men, in different styles, at different times, for different purposes, in different situations, and the different personalities show through. There were no typewriters, and inspiration was not some kind of mechanical dictation. The writers were prepared beforehand by various experiences and gifts to be God’s messengers. There is this very human side to the Bible.

But they did not record their own opinions and ideas about God. They were so controlled by the Spirit of God that they conveyed God's message and words. The control extended to the words, hence "verbal inspiration". As a result, the Word of God is reliable, infallible, and wholly trustworthy. It does not deceive or mislead. Every word is from a human author, yet truly the Word of God. Like the Trinity, and Christ's sin bearing, it is something that we cannot fully explain.

God's handiwork in Scripture is seen in many different ways. The fulfilment of prophesy, the wonderful unity of the 66 books, the power and influence of the Bible (it has emptied temples of idols, raised moral standards, elevated womanhood, brought life and liberty and light). Charles Darwin visited Tierra del Fuego, and recorded the misery of the people there, the appalling wickedness and degradation. Later he returned and found a remarkable change. The people were dressed and behaved less like animals. Enquiry revealed that the Bible had arrived in the intervening years. As a result, Darwin became a subscriber to a missionary society. And he lent a hall in his home village for a preacher to preach. He wrote a letter saying, "Your services here have done more for our village in a few months than all our efforts for many years."

By the way, inspiration was of no particular version in English! The original languages were Hebrew and Greek, and there are differences between the manuscripts that have been found – slight variations though, and not affecting any of the vital doctrine. Only one word in a thousand is in doubt, and we can be sure for all practical purposes that we have in our hand the veritable Word of God.

The purpose of Scripture

We need to be clear about why God has given us the Scriptures. The Bible is not an ancient history book, the story of the Jewish race, a code of ethics, or an encyclopaedia. Nor is it a scientific textbook – which is a mercy for it would very soon be out of date. The scientist asks "how?" but the Bible asks and answers the question "Why?" It speaks in a simple language that can be understood by ordinary people in every generation.

The Holy Scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15). Paul expands this in the next verse, making four points.

- (a) **All Scripture is useful for teaching.** The Scriptures contain all we need to know about spiritual and eternal truth. God? What is He like? How can I know Him? Sin? Salvation? Heaven? Hell? How can I live to please Him?
- (b) **Rebuking.** This is a negative function. It exposes our sin. People find fault with the Bible because it finds fault with them. People do not leave the Bible alone, because it will not leave them alone. Shakespeare and Wordsworth will not disturb the conscience, but the Bible does constantly. It puts the finger on our real problem – the state of the heart.
- (c) **Correcting.** This is positive function. It puts us back on the rails. If the heart is the problem, the Bible speaks of how it can be cleansed and changed, of Christ's death and the work of the Holy Spirit, of forgiveness and new life. It tells us how old things have passed away and all things are new. It tells us how

to face death and eternity. When Sir Walter Scott lay dying, he asked his friend Lockhart to read to him. Lockhart looked at Scott's library of 20,000 volumes, and asked what he should read. Scott replied, "Need you ask? There is but one."

- (d) **Correcting and training in righteousness.** Here we find God's will. We learn about holiness of life, Christian service, divine resources and divine equipment for life and service, Christ indwelling, the Holy Spirit filling, precious promises for those who love God, a word in season for every emergency and condition. Every true servant of the Lord has lived on it and been motivated and strengthened by it daily. It is suitable to meet the spiritual needs of every man in every generation. It is the only book which is never out of date or out of place.

The Scriptures are our infallible guide and perfect authority in all matters of faith and practice. In the chaotic world of today, where men do not know where they are, what to believe or how to behave, what peace, security and confidence there is to found life on the impregnable rock of the Holy Scriptures.

Sufficiency of Scripture

So that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17). The Amplified Version renders this: "That the man of God may be complete and proficient, well fitted and thoroughly equipped for every good work." Some people may say the Bible is alright, but we need something more. The Roman Catholic Church adds on the teaching and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, Councils and Pope. The Mormons add on the Book of Mormon. The Jehovah Witnesses have their own special edition of the Bible (not accurate on certain basic doctrines) and the teaching contained in the "Watchtower".

The distinguishing feature of Evangelical Christianity is that Bible is good, valuable and important, and it is also enough. It is sufficient and adequate to show us what we need to believe, how to behave and how to please and serve the Lord. And in light of the context of Timothy, it shows us how to live and to survive and triumph in the last days with moral decline and religious apostasy. It is particularly clear in guiding us how to live in our pluralistic and permissive society.

Paul urged Timothy to let the Word of God make him a man of God, and the same goes for us. This is a glorious possibility for us daily. How wonderful that we can partake in a daily interview with God and hear Him speak to us! It is the Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible and who gives born again man the final assurance that this is the very word of God by His inward witness in the heart. He also uses the Word of God to speak to our hearts and conditions. He applies it personally to our lives and situations. The perfect combination – the Bible in our hands and the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Study the Word. Is there a promise to claim? A warning to heed? Encouragement to take? Teaching to observe? Sin to forsake? A new direction in life to pursue? Through the Bible we get to know the God of the Bible. Do we know its value and power in our lives daily?

What is your excuse? No time? We always find time for the things we want to do. Only got time to read a little? Then you will only get a little comfort in time of need, little stability in life – and likely make mistakes. Let's read it, and do so earnestly, with child-like faith and obedience, asking God to speak as we listen. Honour it also in families. Where possible, gather around this Book every day and live by it.

Brownlow North said, "You are shut up to one of two things. Either you make your own god and religion for yourself, and stand and fall by it eternally. Or you take the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in His Word. Choose now and for ever. God helping me, I will stand or fall by the Lord Jesus Christ. I will put my trust in His truth as I find it in the written Word of God. And doing that – so sure as the Lord Jesus Christ is the truth, I must be forgiven and saved."