



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Holy Scriptures What's So Special About the Bible? 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Introduction

1. Our sub-title is a "live question." From 2 Timothy, I would add that it is a "life question."
 - a. Paul assumed but offered no proof for the view that the Bible's origin is God. Due to our constraints in this presentation, so will we.¹
 - b. I am developing our study in light of this question: How does 3:14-17 function in Paul's appeal to Timothy to stand firm? In what way is Scripture special for life and service?
2. My thesis: because the Scriptures are special, they supply what we need to live holy lives in a world where both God's power and his people are opposed.
3. I say this because, in 2 Timothy, Paul saw the Scriptures as necessary for supplying the wisdom and power Timothy needed to carry on faithfully in ministry after Paul's death.

Body

- I. Foundation: Timothy's Need for the Scriptures.
 - A. What would you most want to tell those who are close to you if you knew your death was imminent? *That* is what 2 Timothy was for Paul.
 - B. The heart of his answer is found in 1:6-9a.
 1. Press on: "... rekindle the gift of God that is within you . . ." (v. 6, NRSV).

¹ The original title for this class was, "Holy Scriptures: Recognizing the Inspiration and Authority of God's Word (2 Timothy 3:14-17)." The lectureship committee later changed it to the above, which allows for more focus on applying the Bible's specialness to life. However, the original title led me to begin to update my library on the theme of inspiration and authority. In searching for materials to that end, I discovered several books, most of them recent, dealing with the question of inerrancy, the definition of which has become a major point of controversy among evangelicals. From the longer list, I recommend the following as a place to begin one's study, not because I necessarily agree with everything their authors wrote (in the second book, the authors disagree with each other on several points), but because reading them should lead one to examine, more clearly articulate, and more capably defend the divine nature of the Bible.

I. Howard Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1982).

J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett, eds., *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013). Part of the Counterpoints in Bible and Theology Series, this book is a collection of five essays and responses to each by the other four writers on different understandings of inerrancy. In order, the authors are R. Albert Mohler, Jr., Peter Enns, Michael F. Bird, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and John R. Franke.

2. Strength: "for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (v. 7).
 3. Expectation: "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel . . ." (v. 8).
 4. Motivation: " . . . by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling,..." (vv. 8-9a).
- C. Significant in light of this lectureship's theme are Paul's repeated references to holiness throughout this letter.
1. Called to a holy (ἅγιος, *hagios*) calling (1:9).
 2. A vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy (ἁγιάζω, *hagiazō*) (2:21).
 3. In contrast with people who will be unholy (ἄνόσιος, *anosios*) (3:2).
 4. Acquainted from childhood with the sacred (ἱερός, *hieros*) writings (3:15).
- D. Like a helix, three big ideas are woven throughout the letter.
1. *Power* is needed for our service (see 1:7-10, 12; 2:1, 8-9, 19, 22, 25-26; 3:5, 16; 4:1, 18).
 2. Because of the threat of *suffering/persecution* and the possibility that Timothy and others would be *ashamed* of the gospel (see 1:8, 12, 16; 2:3, 9, 18, 24; 3:1-5, 8; 4:4-8, 15).
 3. The *sacred writings* are *vital* to having the power to stand firm (1:1, 5, 8, 10-13; 2:2, 8-9, 14-19, 23-26; 3:7-8, 10, 13-17; 4:1-4, 13, 15).
- II. Scripture Strengthens Against Opposition: "Special" Traits in 3:16-17.
- A. "God-breathed": it supplies the outside wisdom we need for life (see Jer. 10:23).
1. Seeing our need for "wisdom from above" (Jas. 3:15, 17) from 2 Timothy.
 - a) After introducing the idea that believers will be challenged in their endurance for the sake of the gospel (1:3-2:13), Paul turned to specific challenges to that endurance, looking first at problems within the church (2:14-26).
 - (1) Church people are humans who falter (2:16-18, 20-21, 22).
 - (2) We are tempted to handle problems according to accepted wisdom (2:14, 23).
 - (3) Paul's counsel: apply yourself to learning and doing the word that comes from God, a way that leads to handling problems differently (2:15, 19, 24-26).
 - b) Paul then turned to the resistance believers will face from external sources until we receive our reward (3:1-9).
 - (1) Brush-clearing: "the last days" (v. 1) is a final-earth-age (Jewish perspective) phrase, not an end-times phrase (see Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; Joel 2:28; etc.).
 - (2) The intensity waxes and wanes, but so long as the world stands, believers will face difficulties including and like those found in vv. 2-9 (see v. 12).
 - c) Paul's solution: follow the teaching, conduct, aim, faith, etc., that are grounded in the holy writings (ἱερὰ γράμματα) known since childhood (vv. 10-15).
 2. What assurance did Paul have that the Scriptures would supply what was needed?
 - a) θεόπνευστος (*theopneustos*), which is a nominative adjective, not a verb, is literally "God-breath." Scripture has come out of ("exhaled") God.
 - b) Paul explained the process in 1 Corinthians 2:6-13.
 - (1) The Corinthians trusted human wisdom, what was from "this age" (vv. 5-6).
 - (2) Paul was not anti-wisdom; he pointed to an other-worldly wisdom (v. 7).

- (3) That wisdom could come only through the “revealing” (or “disclosing”; ἀποκαλύπτω, *apokaluptō*), that God initiated (“prepared,” ἐτοιμάζω, *etioimazō* put in a state of readiness; v. 9, also v. 11).
 - (a) It was revealed in “words taught by the Spirit,” not human wisdom (v. 13; see Jas. 3:15, 17).
 - (b) The “Spirit” was as close to God’s mind as possible, having searched even the “depths” (βάθος, *bathos*) of God (v. 10).
 - (c) Note that “Spirit” is πνεῦμα (*pneuma*), which sometimes refers to breath or wind (see John 3:8; Jas. 3:8; 2 Thess. 2:8; compare θεόπνευστος).
- (4) The one who learns this wisdom can discern “the mind of the Lord” (v. 16).²
3. It is because Scripture ultimately comes from God that it is “profitable” (“useful” - NET) “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”
- B. “All Scripture”: from Scripture we understand our place in God’s big story.
 1. Timothy would have understood “Scripture” to refer to the Old Testament.
 - a) The NT was not yet in place (but see 2 Pet. 3:16; 1 Tim. 5:18; Col. 4:16).
 - b) Aside from that, the context of 2 Timothy defines “Scripture” (1:5; 2:19; 3:15).
 2. Notice that those writings were able to make Timothy “wise for salvation” (3:15).
 - a) The Old Testament is valuable for learning important principles about relating with God (see Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11; Ex. 34:6-7).
 3. The idea is bigger: the Bible shows our “roots”; we are part of the biggest story.
 - a) Paul did not elaborate as much on the continuing nature of God’s plan in Christ in 2 Timothy as he did elsewhere, but the idea is suggested here (see 1:1, 9; 2:8; see Rom. 1:1-7; 9:4-7; 10:4 [τέλος; NIV 2011, “culmination”]).³
 4. Jesus connected the two testaments as one story in Luke 24:13-47.
 - a) Notice the development of the Emmaus episode in vv. 13-24, esp. v. 21.
 - b) Notice Jesus’ thesis statement in vv. 25-27, especially the phrase in v. 27, “in all the Scriptures *the things concerning himself* (τὰ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ, *ta peri heautou*).”
 - c) Their minds were opened (διανοίγω, *dianoigō*) to the truth about the crucifixion/resurrection events (v. 31) “while he opened (διανοίγω) . . . the Scriptures” (v. 32).
 - d) Notice what he said when he appeared to the entire group in Jerusalem:
 - (1) The law, prophets, and psalms were written about him and needed to be “fulfilled” (a key word in Luke) (v. 44).⁴

² For more on this process, see John 14:26; 16:12-15; 1 Thess. 2:13; Gal. 1:11-12; Eph. 3:3-5.

³ I find helpful Larry Hurtado’s observation that Paul was not “converted” in the sense of moving from irreligion to religion, or even from one religion to another, but rather “from one kind of religious commitment to another (or a radically revised one).” Unlike his Gentile converts, he did not give up his ancestral deity for another (see 1 Thess. 1:9), but participated in the fulfilled development of God’s plan because of God’s “call” (Gal. 1:15-16). (Larry W. Hurtado, *Why On Earth Did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries?* The Père Marquette Lectures in Theology 2016 [Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2016], 116.)

⁴ I take “law, prophets, and psalms” here to refer to the threefold division of Hebrew Scriptures, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, often shortened to “the law and the prophets” (see Lk. 16:16). “The Psalms stood at the head of the Writings and here represents them” (Mark L. Strauss, “Luke,” *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. Clinton E. Arnold [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002], 500). Some think that Luke meant to emphasize the Psalms as a key prophetic text showing the necessity of a suffering Messiah, a view that does not significantly alter the point (see David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011], 967).

- (2) He “opened (διανοίγω) their minds to understand the Scriptures” (v. 45) and said that those Scriptures were written about the suffering and resurrection of the Christ (v. 46).
- (3) Verse 47 declares that this fulfillment (a key idea in Luke) was the basis for the worldwide proclamation of repentance and forgiveness.
- e) Richard Hays has summarized: “. . . the two [Emmaus road] disciples are wrong to be discouraged but right to have hoped for Jesus to be the one who would redeem Israel.⁵ In their puzzled disappointment, they truly name Jesus’ identity without realizing what they are saying, for the Redeemer of Israel is none other than Israel’s God. And Jesus, in truth, is the embodied, unrecognized, but scripturally attested presence of the One for whom they unwittingly hoped.”⁶
- 5. Though phrased differently, Hurtado’s title (see note ³ above) points to the question Paul raised in seed form: Why suffer [in the life of faith] as we do? (2 Tim. 1:8, 12)? Because we are participating in God’s plan.
- C. “Equips for every good work”: it supplies what we need for life and ministry.
 - 1. Two words are noteworthy in v. 17.
 - a) “Complete” — ἄρτιος (*artios*), “pert. to being well fitted for some function, complete, capable, proficient=able to meet all demands” (Bauer, *Lexicon*, 3rd ed.).
 - (1) NET: “may be capable.”
 - (2) NRSV: “proficient.”
 - b) “Equipped” — ἐξαρτίζω (*exartizō*), with the sense, “make ready for service” (Bauer).
 - c) NIRV puts together both ideas: “completely prepared to do every good thing.”
 - 2. In the context of 2 Timothy, Paul is telling Timothy to rely on the Scriptures to meet the challenges from church and culture mentioned above (2:14-3:9).
 - 3. The principle extends to any related matters (including the defending Scripture).

III. What Are We *Doing* with the Bible?

- A. Two passages raise the question of how committed we are to using Scripture.
 - 1. 2:14-16 — in the section dealing with challenges from within the church, Paul told Timothy to spare no effort (σπουδάζω, *spoudazō*) to use “the word of truth” correctly, resisting the temptation to major in minors.
 - 2. 4:1-5 — the famous passage just after 3:16-17 calls Timothy to “preach the word” and use it to do the things that 3:16 said it was useful for; failure to do this will see God’s people deviate from the healthy teaching (“sound doctrine” - 4:3).
- B. Taken together, these passages call for the most serious approach to Scripture in our study and teaching.
 - 1. We need to ponder and give more attention to the significance of the early church’s serious practice of teaching.

⁵ See Luke 1:68 — “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people” (NASB).

⁶ Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 74.

- a) I can only introduce it here, but consider the emphasis in Acts on teaching the word, not only in Jewish settings (2:41-42; 13:15, 26, 44, 46, 48-49; 28:31), but also in pagan cities (17:19; 18:5, 11; 19:10).⁷
 - b) Think, too, about how Paul quotes Scripture in his epistles to churches largely made up of Gentiles, giving attention both to his repeated “do you not know?” (e.g., Rom. 6:3, 16; 1 Cor. 6:9, 15, 19; etc.) and to the arguments that he grounded in the OT and expected even Gentiles who had converted from paganism (as opposed to the God-fearers) to understand.
 - c) They took catechesis seriously (see the word *κατηχέω* (*katēcheō*), especially in Gal. 6:6; and also Lk. 1:4; 1 Cor. 14:19).
2. In light of this, consider the following ideas.
- a) Even Sunday-school *mastery* may be inadequate.⁸
 - b) Certainly, an approach that treats the Bible as little more than a wise-sayings book or talisman is out of step with Paul’s call to diligence in study (2 Tim. 2:15).
 - c) The influence of modern media raises particular challenges: it is one thing to adjust our methods and another thing to be so method-conscious that we allow the adverse effects of modern media to become our norm, too.⁹
 - d) “Handling aright the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15) calls for being more serious about textual preaching (as opposed to what is often, at best, “proof-textual” preaching).

Conclusion

1. The Psalmist wrote: “⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward” (Psalm 19:7-11).
2. Writings that give us the power we need for life and ministry and to endure hardship in the face of opposition to God, his way, and his people. How special is *that*?

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⁷ Acts 19:10 is especially interesting, showcasing *both* evangelism and edification.

⁸ How many of us would go to a doctor whose training was no more substantive than many Sunday schools? My point is not that we should teach all church classes at an academic level, but that we seek to decrease the gap between the academic and what we often see.

⁹ See T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2009). Gordon acknowledges his debt to others for his assessment of “media ecology,” especially the older, but still timely and excellent book by Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).