

The Impact of God's Word

By Tom Hill

Bible Text: 2 Timothy 3:14-17

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2 Timothy 3:14-17

“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; {15} And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. {16} All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: {17} That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

This well-known text addresses a critical problem today, the authority of God's word. We easily identify the rejection of Biblical authority by the world and the godless. They reject it completely. They scoff at the truth of the Bible's divine inspiration and rule over them. In contrast, the Church of Jesus Christ and professing Christians proudly and loudly proclaim the authority of the Bible in their lives.

The rejection of Biblical authority has invaded the Church of Jesus Christ today, too. This denial has developed into a false doctrine about the Scriptures. This condition has not happened suddenly, but has developed very subtly over a long period of time. In fact, most believers fail to recognize its existence. However, many clues confirm this sinful condition.

Clues

First, the Church practices a postmodern attitude toward Biblical truth. In its desire to include everyone, the Church promotes a Bible study format that encourages every one to participate by sharing their thoughts on a passage of Scripture. Seldom does the leader correct any false viewpoints presented for fear of antagonizing or hurting the one(s) who gave it. In addition, few leaders themselves know the distinctions between truth and error.

Thus, no true, objective standard of Biblical truth exists. Everyone's viewpoint on Scripture carries the same value. “After all,” we say, “it's a matter of interpretation,” with no correct or true interpretation provided. It boils down to this: truth does not matter. What matters is what the Scriptures seem to say to me, without consideration for the truth. How I feel about a given passage from the Bible determines its meaning. A text, then, could conceivably carry a whole variety of meanings, depending upon the person.

By default, then, the Church tolerates error. By its actions, the Church says that the Bible contains the word of God, truth, instead of it being the word of God, the truth that mankind can know and understand. It individualizes truth. It depends only upon what is “truth” to the individual or group opinion.

Second, the Church of Jesus Christ rejects the necessity of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures and its truths. Several present day attacks undermine this essential doctrine of God's word.

The postmodern approach to Biblical truth fails to believe in the concept of absolute truth. Since everything depends upon one's interpretation, then no absolute truth exists. This practice questions fundamental truth, misrepresents it, and distorts it.

The Church waffles on the authority of the Bible under attack from science, history, and various other branches of human thought. We yield authority and validity to them and assign error to the Biblical passage under scrutiny. We add to our sin by discounting even doubting the supernatural elements recorded there. This path leads ultimately to a denial of God's intervention into life.

By default the Church, then, doubts the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture. It has passed from divine revelation to merely an ordinary book of fine, but obsolete literature. It has become a book among books of human origin, but certainly not divine, because it contains errors. In effect, the Church rejects the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture by God through the Holy Spirit.

Further, the Church of Jesus Christ presents the Bible as a handbook to guide humankind in its search for God, instead of providing God's self-revelation of Himself. Therefore, we make God in our own image, turn the truth of God into a lie, and defy God Who has revealed Himself in His word. This concept denies God's intervention into human life and ultimately questions whether anyone can ever know that God exists or if anyone can know Him if He does exist.

Third, the Church consents to selective obedience to Biblical teaching and commands. Since ultimately truth depends upon how I interpret it, and since evidence proves it contains errors, then selective obedience and a concurrent rejection of submission to all of Scripture occurs. The Christian then disobeys its commands and ignores its application in life.

Fourth, the Church of Jesus Christ substitutes reason, education, and knowledge for spiritual revelation, illumination, and insight. The infallibility of human reason now dictates the meaning of the Bible. Human reason stands as the final authority, not the Bible. Truth, and right and wrong, now bow to the standard of human reason. Humanity, the new deity, determines truth.

The search for truth now follows a different path. We now seek for life's answers by conforming to the world's methods. We seek for it by reasoning, by understanding, and by

speculation. By emphasizing our knowledge, we subject the Bible to critical analysis from science, history, and opinion. Psychology, science, and philosophy now interpret the Bible in hopes of finding solutions to life's circumstances.

Sadly, such an approach rejects the Holy Spirit as revealer of truth of God's word.

Fifth, the Church of Jesus Christ fails to teach Biblical doctrine. In its feeble attempt to correct disagreement and disorder, the Church elevates unity over truth. Such ill-fated attempts compromise truth and open the door to error, even heresy. Further, ministers, feeling pressure from strife and feuding factions, flee doctrinal preaching in favor of "How To" messages to satisfy their audiences. They concentrate instead upon felt needs.

Sixth, and finally, believers today most obviously lack the fruit of the word in practical life. A variety of different examples prove the point. For instance, believers today neglect serious meditation upon the Bible and the direct application of its truths. It shows in the lack of self-examination under Biblical precepts and a failure to study God's word. Without it, conviction of sin is absent, and application of truth breaks down.

Another case in point emerges because believers disobey the Bible's commands. Obedience goes wanting in the wake of neglected study and application. This sin affects individuals and the Church collectively. At the least, it reveals an uncertainty of the Bible's sufficiency for life and godliness. An emphasis upon religious activity has replaced simple obedience to the Scriptures. Further, the Church of Jesus Christ fails to walk in the Spirit, but lives according to the flesh.

Numerous evidences prove the failure to walk in the Spirit. Sadly, the works of the flesh that are stated in Galatians 5.19-21 and Colossians 3.5 permeate the Church today. Sexual immorality, false worship of God, and strife too often raise their evil heads not only in the congregation but also in the leadership, even the pastorate. Holy living has fallen upon hard times. Rarely is it mentioned; it is virtually extinct in the Church of Jesus Christ today.

Holy Spirit filled believers have become an abnormality. Instead, fear of the very mention of the Holy Spirit and outright rejection of His ministry rule the day. Surely, our sins have grieved and quenched His mighty presence and work in our midst.

Although presented in summary arrangement, the foregoing examples indeed demonstrate that the Church of Jesus Christ rejects Biblical authority. It began very subtly but has escalated into a significant problem. The failure to recognize it serves to intensify its magnitude. It now permeates and affects virtually every aspect of the Church.

Consequences

The rejection of Biblical authority yields significant consequences, which stain the Church of Jesus Christ and believers today. First, believers suffer individually and collectively as the Church. They lack spiritual power. Spiritual maturity in the Church goes

wanting. Faith in God declines. Discontent and uncertainty trouble believers. The Church lacks direction and looks to the world for help. The rejection of Biblical authority causes Christians to question, misrepresent, and finally to distort fundamental truth. The inevitable result, sin, comes because the child of God fails to believe the Bible rightly and fails to obey God thoroughly.

Second, the rejection of Biblical authority offends a holy God. This evil practice fails to honor and glorify God. It leads to idolatry, the worship of a false god fashioned after defiled reason. Prayers go unanswered. God withdraws His glorious presence and begins to judge His children for their sin.

Third, this sin of the Church causes offense to the Holy Spirit. To reject Biblical authority resists the work of the Holy Spirit, Who breathed its message into life. Such betrayal grieves Him and quenches His work. Thus, without His power, believers operate in the flesh, which is enmity against God and cannot please Him (Romans 8.5-8).

Finally, to reject the authority of God's word tramples on the person and work of Jesus Christ. After all, the Bible speaks primarily to One Person, Jesus Christ. It promises Him. It predicts His works on behalf of sinners. It describes the sinner's need of Him. It reveals the gospel in its entire splendor. In effect, then, this evil rejects Jesus Christ.

Space does not allow a full inventory of the dire consequences of this sin. Its implications permeate the very lives of believers. It constrains and even eliminates the glorious presence and work of God in the Church. He does not condone or excuse sin.

Cause

At first glance, you would think this condition originates from an intellectual problem. But it does not. Increased emphasis upon apologetics will not cure it. Well-defined data from archeology will not heal the evil, either. Neither will well reasoned argumentation solve the dilemma. None of these efforts will correct the sin of rejecting Biblical authority, because this evil does not result from an intellectual problem.

Instead, it arises from a moral problem. The natural human heart hates God. Neither will it subject itself unto God. It fights against the Holy Spirit and His workings in mankind (Romans 8.5-8). Thus, the rejection of His word develops from an unbelieving and disobedient heart. The solution, then, requires a change of the moral condition of the heart.

Crossroads

The Church of Jesus Christ, perhaps even you, faces a crossroads. One option urges you to continue to follow the present path, away from God and submission to His word. The other calls you to correction from the present path, to God and submission to His word as infallible and authoritative for life and practice.

Cure

It is precisely to this issue that Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, speaks to Timothy. In fact, the context of Paul's counsel centers upon the rebellion of evil men against the truth (2 Timothy 3.1-13). Against these conditions, the Spirit prompts Paul to direct Timothy to the Scriptures.

Our text provides the doctrine that when believed and obeyed will help us overcome the common rejection of Biblical authority and remedy the problem. The Bible conclusively reveals God's word to humankind, exerts authority over His creation, and, when believed and obeyed, produces divine effects.

To see these divine realities requires spiritual illumination of them by the Holy Spirit. For in this passage, the Spirit reveals through Paul's counsel to Timothy the very truths that conquer these errors. May He come in grace and open your eyes to see their truthfulness and apply them to your life.

Divine authorship of the Scriptures

Our text clearly asserts the divine author of the Scriptures, God Himself. In verse 16, Paul unmistakably named God as the author: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God..." This statement makes four declarations relative to the Scriptures.

First, it removes man as the source. Humanity did not self-generate the Biblical record. Nor did it flow from man to man. It was given to him without human invention, intervention, inclination, interpretation, imagination, or intention.

Second, the Bible is inspired or divinely breathed into the writers. Some power other than their own moved upon them. The writers recorded what this other power inspired them to write.

Third, this other power was no less than God Himself. He initiated the process. He inspired the writers and revealed to them the message that He wanted known. He elevated them above their natural ability and bore them along. The message of the Bible, then, originated from God and came from Him to mankind. He breathed into life.

Fourth, it includes all Scripture, not just parts of Scripture. Today, philosophy tries to say that all Scripture that is inspired is from God. This conclusion leaves open the door to reject certain parts as not inspired, based upon human reasoning. However, the text clearly negates this fallacy. The phrase "all Scripture" includes each separate unit, the matter, and the words. This statement includes the topics, ideas, concepts, and the words that explain and reveal them. Thus, inspiration by God is thorough and complete.

Evidence from other Biblical references confirms these conclusions. I will mention two of them. Notice the precision of 1 Thessalonians 2:13:

“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”

Here the apostle states that it came not from men to men but from God to men: “...not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God...” He clearly verifies God as the source and author of Scripture. Of a surety, it came from God, and it is His word to humankind.

See the verification of these truths again in 2 Peter 1:21:

"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

Here Peter validates these truths. The Bible came not by private interpretation, e. g., from the writer's own self or personal explanation. Neither did it come as the result of the writer's own will.

Instead, he explains that God moved upon the authors by His Holy Spirit, who moved them as they wrote. The message came at the initiative of God, from His mind and origin to the authors. The Holy Spirit bore them along and elevated them above their human and natural ability to inscribe God's word to us.

I want to declare without any question the divine authorship of the Bible. God inspired it and breathed it into the minds and hearts of those who recorded it for our benefit.

Divine authority of the Scriptures

Because of its divine authorship, God's word demands faith and obedience to its message. That alone should make it unnecessary to defend and prove its authority. Nevertheless, the Spirit moved Paul to affirm this truth to Timothy. Paul directed Timothy to continue in that which he had learned from the Scriptures.

The word continue carries a significant meaning, specifically as it relates to the Bible. It describes its application in life. For example, it entails abiding and dwelling in the Word. It includes enduring and remaining in it. Further, it requires standing in it.

These definitions confirm the counsel that Paul had given to Timothy on other occasions. In his first letter, the Apostle counseled him to continue in the doctrine that would save him and others (1 Timothy 4.16). In earlier portions of his second letter, Paul directed Timothy to hold fast the word and to commit it to others who in like manner would entrust it to others, too (2 Timothy 1.13; 2.2). Clearly, the Holy Spirit conveyed through Paul to Timothy the authority of the Scriptures in life.

Paul does not stand alone in declaring their authority. Peter charged believers with the same truth. For example, he instructed his Christian brothers and sisters "... (to) take heed..." unto the Scriptures (2 Peter 1.19). As with Paul's directive to continue in the word of God, so Peter's instruction to take heed conveys strong implications.

It, too, speaks to the issue of application in life. It means to hold the mind towards God's word. It requires one to pay attention to it and to apply oneself to it. Further, it compels believers to search, study, and subject themselves to it.

Time and space prevent the addition of the wealth of examples from the Bible that declare its authority in life. David, the prophets, and Solomon, to name just a few, emphatically proclaim the authority of the Scriptures for life and practice.

Divine aim of the Scriptures

Finally, our text presents the divine aim of the Scriptures. The Scriptures give that knowledge of God and His will for humanity's most crucial problem: God's plan for mankind's salvation from sin, and the function of Scripture in living out the Christian life in daily practice.

The text states that the "... (Scriptures) are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." In fact, the Bible declares one theme and message, justification by faith in Jesus Christ alone. To make one wise unto salvation, the Bible reveals three great truths necessary to a person's coming to Christ in saving faith: the poverty of mankind, the plan of God, and the provision in Jesus Christ for sinners.

The Scriptures present the true condition of humanity by describing our spiritual poverty. They declare, first, the inherent sinfulness of all people. Because of the sin of Adam, the sinful nature passed to all individuals (Romans 5.12). Thus, every human being possesses a sinful nature, a darkened understanding, and alienation from God (Ephesians 4.18). Such sinful nature plagues every human creature thoroughly and completely, without exception, so that they are spiritually dead (Romans 3.10; Ephesians 2.1).

In addition, this inherent sinful nature produces sinful practices and behavior. Everyone is a sinner, but not because (s)he practices sin. People practice sin because they are sinners (Romans 3.9, 23). In fact, the inherent sinful nature prevents humans from practicing anything but sin. They are incapable of any good thing. Thus, they cannot earn their salvation by any good works, because they cannot perform them.

In short, humanity's spiritual poverty renders them helpless, dead, before a holy God. In themselves, they have no hope of satisfying a holy God.

However, in grace God created a plan that will justify sinners before Him. It is a plan of grace, because God is under no requirement to make any provision for sinners. In pure justice, He could have confined all people to eternal judgment because of their sin.

However, as an expression of His great love, He devised a plan for the redemption of sinners and chose out from all sinful humanity a people for Himself (Ephesians 1.4; 2 Thessalonians 2.13). At the time of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, God promised a Savior (Genesis 3.15). The prophets foretold His coming, too, and called Him the Son of God (Isaiah 9.6; Psalm 2). They described how He would make atonement for the sins of God's chosen people (Isaiah 53; Daniel 9.24).

God's plan reveals His great grace and mercy. Under no compulsion, He chose out from sinful humankind a people for Himself and provided a Redeemer for these helpless sinners. In so doing, He could be just and the justifier of sinners (Romans 3.26).

At God's appointed time, His provision in Jesus Christ, the promised Savior, appeared in fulfillment of His promise. The Bible gives ample evidence that God satisfied His promise in Jesus Christ. The Angel who announced His impending birth assured her of the promise (Matthew 1.21). Jesus Himself declared that the Scriptures spoke of Him (John 5.39). Further, the apostles pointed to Jesus Christ as the Savior of sinners (Acts 10.43; 1 Corinthians 15.3-4; 1 Peter 1.10-12).

Furthermore, Jesus Christ made the promised payment in full for the sins of those whom God gave to Him. Jesus came to give His life for the ransom of many (Matthew 20.28; John 10.15). His substitutionary death on the cross satisfied God's righteous anger (Hebrews 9-10; 2.17; Romans 3.25; 1 John 2.2; 4.10). In His death, Jesus Christ reconciled God's chosen people to the Father and redeemed them from the curse of the law (Romans 5.10; 2 Corinthians 5.20; Galatians 3.13).

In addition to the provision of Jesus Christ for sinners, God further proves His grace and mercy by calling His chosen people to faith in the One Whom He gave for them. The Holy Spirit declares through Paul that those whom God chose, He called (Romans 8.28-29). In fact, Jesus Christ said that no one could come to Him unless the Father drew him (John 6.44). The Father, by the work of the Holy Spirit, draws sinners to the Savior and brings them to repent and believe on Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners (Mark 1.15; Acts 16.31; Ephesians 2.8-9). Jesus calls sinners to repent and to believe Him to the saving of their souls (Mark 1.15; Luke 13.3-5).

It is of these truths that Paul reminded Timothy. He jogged Timothy's memory that the Scriptures make one wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Further, the text reveals another aim of the Scriptures by emphasizing their effect in life. In the text, verses 16 and 17 describe the effect of the word of God in life. They are profitable in the lives of those who believe and obey them. They convey the truth, convict of sin, correct from sin unto righteousness, and complete the believer thoroughly "...unto all good works."

Not only does all saving knowledge come from the Bible. It is the only rule by which believers may know God and how to glorify Him in life and practice.

Diligent application

Yes, we live in a day of rebellion against the authority of God's word. Sadly, this rebellion not only exists in the world but in the Church of Jesus Christ, as well. Perhaps it has influenced your life, too. For these reasons, the truths stated in our text require diligent application.

Has God's word proven profitable in your life in daily practice? Our text identifies four fruits of God's word in the life of the Christian: it clarifies the truth, it convicts of sin, it corrects from sin, and it completes the child of God unto good works.

If these fruits have confirmed the work of the Scriptures in your life, keep on. Rest not. Grow not weary in well doing. God's word will prove even more fruitful as you continue to believe and obey it. If your life fails to reveal these fruits, turn in repentance and renewed obedience to submit to their authority in your life. The Holy Spirit will bring forth the promised results for you, too.

Have the Scriptures made you wise unto salvation? Has the Holy Spirit used them to open your eyes to your true condition before God without Christ? Have you seen the gracious provision of God in Christ for sinners like you? Has the Holy Spirit shown you that Jesus Christ died in complete payment for the sins of people like you? Have you repented of your sin and cast yourself in faith solely upon Jesus Christ and His death in payment for your sin?

If you have, rejoice at God's great grace and mercy, which He has given to you. If you have not, turn in repentance from your sin, and look to Jesus alone in faith to save you (Isaiah 45.22). I pray that the Holy Spirit will bring this message to fruition in your life today.

I earnestly pray that God, by His Holy Spirit, will come in grace and apply these truths to your life today.