

The Centrality of Scripture

Part 2

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Faithfulness in last days ministry is strengthened by believing in the efficacy of the word of God.

LTS: Psa.

One of the reasons Christians love the pastoral epistles (1& 2 Timothy and Titus) is that they offer such practical instruction for how God wants his church to do ministry in these last days. Recently, we have been rediscovering this in our study of 2 Timothy.

Last week, for example, we began studying Paul's view of the centrality of the word of God in the church and in Christian ministry. The question we sought to answer was, "Why should Christian men and women build their lives and ministries around the word of God. Why should the Bible be central to everything we do?"

Paul offers a three-part answer in 2 Tim. 3:14-17. Christians and churches should build their lives and ministries around the word of God because three marvelous realities:

- I. The Authority of Scripture:
- II. The Efficacy of Scripture:
- III. The Sufficiency of Scripture:

That Paul viewed the Scriptures as authoritative, Efficacious, and Sufficient is evident in the short passage we are studying this month. So, let's stand and read it together.

Read 2 Tim 3:14-17

We invested all of our time last week thinking about the Authority of Scripture. Again, it's important to remember the context here. Paul is about to be executed. He knows his time is short and he's offering Timothy his final instructions to make sure he is fully equipped to take over his ministry. And here toward the end of his last letter he reiterates what is most important; namely, a commitment to Scripture.

In v. 14-15 Paul reminds us that Timothy had been taught the Scriptures from his earliest years. His mother and grandmother took the duty of filling his heart with eternal

truth very seriously. Moreover, upon joining Paul's team of missionary church planters, Timothy was discipled by the great apostle himself.

This was important because Paul wanted Timothy to build his whole life and ministry around the Scriptures. Why? Because no other book in the world speaks with such authority. In fact, the word of God (the Scripture) is the final court of appeal for every question of life and godliness. It alone provides all the necessary instruction to teach us how to please the Lord in every circumstance of life.

What makes the Scriptures so authoritative? The awesome fact that (16),

“All Scripture is breathed-out by God.”

Let there be no mistake. There is NO authority higher than God's. Ultimate all authority resides in Him.

- God did not inherit his authority
- God did not receive his authority
- God's authority did not come to him by election or conquest.
 - To understand and accept God's authority is as simple as accepting the fact of God Himself.¹
 - Since he existed before everything; since he created all there is, since he exercises sovereign dominion over the world and all that is in it;
 - and since he will one day destroy it for his own purposes; He is the ultimate and final authority over the universe. Whenever he speaks, he speaks with absolute authority.

Therefore, to say that All Scripture is breathed out by God is to say that the Scriptures speak as the ultimate and final authority on every subject to which it speaks.

This is what we mean when we speak of the Authority of Scripture
Second, Paul speaks of ...

II. The Efficacy of Scripture:

1. Notice what he says (16),

¹ MacArthur & Mayhue, *Bible Doctrine*, (Wheaton, Crossway, 2017), 101

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

2. Paul is saying that because God’s word always speaks with divine authority, it always accomplishes what God intends. In the end we will all discover that every word of God was TRUE. Every promise will be fulfilled. Every warning will be vindicated. Every pronouncement of judgment will be executed.

3. This is no news to any of you, but we live in a world of bad advice and broken promises. It’s always been that way as long as man has been on the earth. For example,

A. In the garden of Eden, a serpent promised Eve the knowledge of good and evil, but it turned about to be a dreadful lie. It didn’t deliver what was promised - to man’s everlasting harm.

B. Sara assured Abraham that the promised son could come through her maidservant just as easily as it could come through her. But that turned out to be a misguided shortcut and didn’t deliver what was promised.

C. Delilah suggested to Samson that the way to her heart was to tell her the truth about his strength, but it was ruse. What was promised, she had no intention of delivering and Samson paid for it dearly.

D. Someone among a group of boys one day persuaded his friends that it would be fun to harass the prophet Elisha calling him “Bald head.” What began as a foolish promise for fun was answered by a she-bare who taught those boys an unforgettable lesson in manners.

E. I was once told that I could make a significant amount of money as a college student by convincing my friends to change their phone service over to a new company named Sprint. But there was fine print that I didn’t account for and the promise never materialized. All I did was tarnish my own reputation among my friends.

4. But Paul wants us to know, however, that the word of God accomplishes what it’s sent to do. It is not given merely to think about or argue over. It is given to us to be used. And it is profitable, useful, and valuable in all the difficulties and joys of ministry.

5. We call this the Efficacy of Scripture. Now, the word “Efficacy” is not one that we typically use in modern parlance, but it is an appropriate term here. Efficacy means “The capacity to produce a desired result.” In other words, God has given us his word

for a purpose, and it has the power or capacity to produce the desired result. If we use the word Efficacy as an adjective, we might say the Scriptures are “Efficacious.” And we can see what this word means whenever we read from the prophet, Isaiah.

6. You will remember what the Lord said through the prophet, Isaiah (55:10-11),

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

7. God is teaching Israel about his Efficacious word. God’s word never misses the mark. It never fails. It always delivers exactly what it promises. That doesn’t mean man can always see God’s desired result come to pass. To be sure, much of what God does in the world is invisible, but it is no less real and powerful.

8. Paul is saying, as you are ministering to churches and individuals Use The Word. Use God’s authoritative word.

9. When I was in Israel earlier this year I noticed some framed snippets of advice that I suppose were intended to encourage people in their daily grind. Here are some samples:

- A. Happiness comes when we stop complaining about the troubles we have, and say Thanks To God for the troubles we don’t have.
- B. For every minute you are angry, you lose sixty seconds of happiness.
- C. In every end there is a new beginning.
- D. Finding love is in the hand of [God]. Keeping it is a work of art.

10. Now, can you imagine Timothy using such vain and vacuous platitudes in his ministry? Of course not! But I would dare say that this is the kind of so-called wisdom that many (if not most) on-air Christians use to encourage and instruct people in the way they should go. Paul is saying: Timothy, use the Scriptures.

- A. When you need to offer hope, use the Scriptures
- B. When you need to convict and correct, use the Scriptures.
- C. When you have the opportunity to teach, use the Scriptures.
- D. When you are helping a married couple reconcile, use the Scriptures
- E. When there is a devastating loss, minister the Scriptures.

11. These words are the only words that are “breathed out by God.” They are the only words that carry the authority of God.

12. The word of God is unlike anything else on the world. Other “voices” may sound clever, or wise, or mystical, or scientific, or psychological, or entertaining, but the “Voice” of God – the Word of God – is the only truth that can save and transform the hearts of sinners. Why? Because only the words of Scripture come from the very mouth of God.

13. Not only does the message of Scripture come from a different source (and an infinitely better one), it is the only source of truth that has the power to equip men and women to accomplish everything God wants us to be and do. Notice the four things God says the Scriptures are profitable for:

- A. **Teaching:** The Bible instructs the believer what to believe is true. “Teaching” is related to content and doctrine. This fits with Jesus instruction in the Great Commission that disciples are to be taught to observe all that he has commanded (Matt. 28:18-20). Scripture teaches the believer what to believe and how to live in obedience to God.
- B. **Reproof:** This term shows the Scripture’s purpose of admonishment (*nouthetao*). It has to do with pointing out where a person has erred or departed from what God requires. Scripture is able to judge the heart when a believer has deviated in doctrine or practice from the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Heb. 4:12).
- C. **Correction:** This is the companion to reproof. The Bible not only shows a person where he is wrong, it also reveals attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that one should put on in its place (Eph. 4:20-24)
- D. **Training in righteousness:** This refers to the fact that the Bible shows how to put its teaching into practice on a daily basis with illustrations and examples (Eph. 5:25-32). Between the Scriptures and the indwelling Holy Spirit, the believer needs no additional revelation to be informed on how to live in a way that glorifies God and brings the believer great joy.

14. So when you stand to teach or sit with someone to counsel, whose voice will your audience here? The only time God’s voice is heard from my mouth is when I am truly and accurately ministering God’s word. His words are the ONLY words that have the power to change us and conform us into his image Only His words can create faith in a sinner’s heart. Only his words can sanctify.

15. Why is God so concerned that you preach, teach and minister His word? It’s because His word is the only word that can bring to people exactly what they need and everything they need. Turn with me to Psalm 19

Read Psalm 19:7-14

16. This passage is all about the Efficacy of Scripture. Again, when we say the Scriptures are Efficacious, we mean that God's word has the power to successfully inform and change us.

- A. In verses 7-9 we discover very specific statements about Scripture. There are six titles for Scripture: Law, Testimony, Precepts, Commandments, Fear, and Judgments.
- B. There are also six characteristics: It is Perfect, Sure, Right, Pure, Clean, and True.
- C. Notice how many times the phrase "of the Lord" is here in the text (v. 7-9). Six times we are reminded that this book is from the Lord. It is God's own revelation about His word. It is God's perspective on His word.
- D. But what I want to focus on for the next few minutes is what the word of God accomplishes in people's lives:
 - (v. 7) "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul."
 - 1) The word for "Perfect" means "complete" (It is perfect as opposed to incomplete). What does the "perfect" word do? It "Restores the soul."
 - 2) "Soul" (nephesh) means the "inner person," the real you. The Spiritual you. By the power of the word of God our souls are changed. They are renewed. Our whole inner person is transformed.
 - (v. 7) "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple."
 - 3) "Sure" means firm, reliable,
 - 4) The Psalmist says, It makes the simple wise. The word simple means "an open door." It means to lack discernment. People have minds like a door, and they don't know when to open the door and when to shut the door.
 - 5) It is not wise to always be open-minded. We need to know what is good and what is bad, what is helpful and what is dangerous; what is right and what is wrong.

- (v. 8) “The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.”
 - 1) Right means they set a right path. God’s word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. How do you navigate through life, in marriage, with your employer, your neighbors, your children? The precepts of the Lord lay out a clear path.
 - 2) It rejoices the heart. Scripture brings joy. True joy comes from following God’s word. Jesus said (John 15:11), “These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”
 - 3) You can maintain joy and teach your people to have joy by learning and obeying the word of God. Scripture is God’s fountain of Joy.

- (v. 8) “The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.”
 - 6) “Pure” means clear. The word of God gives clarity.

 - 7) It enlightens our eyes. That is, it enables us to see and evaluate clearly. When we face difficult trials in life, we need clarity. And God gives it to us by His word. By Scripture we learn that even death cannot kill us. We know that God is causing all things to work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose. Unbelievers don’t know that. They don’t have that kind of clarity because they reject the commandments of the Lord.

- (v. 9) “The fear of the Lord is clean; enduring forever.”
 - 8) “Clean” means without corruption or error, or evil. “Every word of God is pure.” The Bible teaches us how to worship God in an acceptable way.
 - 9) And it endures forever. That is, it’s timeless. The Psalms were written thousands of years ago and yet they still speak forth the pure, unchanging truth of God.

- “The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.”
 - 10) “Judgments” are divine verdicts by the God who is the judge of all men. God renders the final verdict on every man, and every nation.
 - 11) His judgments are “True.” He never misses it. His verdict is always perfect, always complete, and always righteous altogether.

17. My friends, do you see what a treasure we have in the Word of God? Do you realize how precious a gift to man the Scriptures are? Do you comprehend how valuable it is to those who will believe and obey it? This wasn't lost on David. We know that because of the delight he expresses at the end.

18. In v 10-11 David exclaims, “More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the dripping of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them your servant is warned. In keeping them there is great reward.”

19. Why should the Scriptures occupy the center of your life and ministry? Because it is not comes to us with God's authority, but also because of it's divine Efficacy: It has the power to accomplish all accomplish all that God wants done in this world.

20. So you see, everything that you want for the people you serve comes from the word of God.

- A. Do you want to see people's lives truly transformed? Give them the Law of the Lord.
- B. Do you want to teach people how to live wisely in the midst of a crooked world? Teach them the Testimony of the Lord.
- C. Do you want to help suffering people experience true and lasting joy? Serve them the precepts of the Lord.
- D. Do you want your children to have clarity in their thinking about God, life, their own hearts, and the world around them? Feed them the commandments of the Lord.

- E. Do you want them to know how to worship and be grounded in truth that is always reliable and never changes? Preach to them the fear of the Lord.

- F. Do you want sinners to turn from their sins and find the righteousness they desperately need in the Lord Jesus Christ? Declare to them the judgments of the Lord.

21. Christian, this is your calling. Every day God offers you the privilege of speaking on his behalf for the good others and the glory of God. In doing so, he calls you to proclaim His truth, not your own. It is NOT your job to come up with a message for people. God has written a message to them. You are simply the mailman. Or, to use a different analogy, God has prepared a great feast for them, and you are the waiter charged with the simple duty of setting His delicacies before them without messing it up.

22. Why should the word of God occupy the central place in your life and ministry? Because only the Word of God speaks with ultimate authority, and divine Efficacy.

23. Next week I want to finish the chapter by looking at the third quality of Scripture alluded to in these verses; namely, the Sufficiency of Scripture.