

Reformation 500

Scripture Alone

2 Timothy 3:1-17

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Scripture

During this fall, we are focusing our attention on the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation began when an Augustinian monk name Martin Luther nailed *Ninety-Five Theses* to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. His propositions sparked a debate that eventually gave us five key Reformation doctrines, and are usually referred to by their Latin names: *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), *solus Christus* (Christ alone), *sola gratia* (grace alone), *sola fide* (faith alone), and *soli deo Gloria* (glory to God alone). Today, I would like to examine Scripture alone.

Let's read 2 Timothy 3:1-17:

¹ But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. ⁶ For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, ⁷ always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. ⁸ Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. ⁹ But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.

¹⁰ You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹ my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which

persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. ¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 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. 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. (2 Timothy 3:1-17)

Introduction

Martin Luther started the Protestant Reformation when he nailed his *Ninety-Five Theses* on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. Luther's concern regarding the Scripture was that it should be the sole, ultimate authority for the Church and Christians. The Roman Catholic Church in Luther's day also believed that the Scripture was authoritative for faith and life. However, they did not believe that Scripture was the sole, ultimate authority. They believed that of equal authority to the Scripture were the traditions of the Church, the councils of the Church, and the Pope. Luther and the other Protestant Reformers said that the Scripture, the traditions, the councils, and the Pope did not have equal authority. They asserted that the supreme and sole authority was the Scripture. That is why they said that *Scripture alone* was authoritative.

For almost 500 years the Evangelical Church agreed that the Scripture was the sole, ultimate authority for the Church. The authority of Scripture is a settled doctrine in the Church. However, the doctrine that we must recover today is not the *authority* of Scripture but rather the *sufficiency* of Scripture. James Montgomery Boice, upon whose book titled *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of*

Grace? much of the material for this series is based, wrote:

The Reformers wanted Scripture to stand alone as the church's true authority. Today, at least in the evangelical church, that is not our chief problem; we assert biblical authority. Rather, our problem is in deciding whether the Bible is *sufficient* for the church's life and work. We confess its authority, but we discount its ability to do what is necessary to draw unbelievers to Christ, enable us to grow in godliness, provide direction for our lives, and transform and revitalize society. So, we substitute such things as Madison Avenue methodology for biblical evangelism, special "religious" experiences rather than knowledge of the word to promote and guarantee sanctification, special revelations for discerning the will of God for our lives, and a trust in the power of votes and money to change society. In other words, in the sixteenth century the battle was against those who wanted to add church traditions to Scripture, but in our day the battle is against those who would have us use worldly means to do God's work.¹

The questions that face us as a Church today are these: Do we believe that God has given us everything we need for faith and life in this book? Or do we suppose that we have to supplement the Scripture with other things to make our ministry effective? As Boice asks, "Do we need sociological techniques to do evangelism, pop psychology and pop psychiatry for Christian growth, extra-biblical signs or miracles for guidance, or political tools for achieving social progress and reform?"²

Lesson

2 Timothy 3:1-17 teaches us that Scripture contains everything we need God to tell us for faith and life.

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?: Rediscovering the Doctrines that Shook the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 66.

² James Montgomery Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?*, 72.

Let's use the following outline:

1. We Face Difficult Times Ahead (3:1-9)
2. We Firmly Believe God's Word (3:10-17)

I. We Face Difficult Times Ahead (3:1-9)

First, we face difficult times ahead.

The Apostle Paul warned his young protégé Timothy that **in the last days** he was going to face **difficult times of difficulty** (3:1). They were going to be days in which **“people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”** (3:2-4). Some people interpret the **last days** to refer to the time just before the second coming of Jesus. However, Paul was warning Timothy about the difficult times that *he* was going to face. So, the **last days** must therefore refer to the entire time between Jesus' first and second coming. The description of the difficult times ahead was true not only for Timothy but it is a presciently accurate description of the difficult times ahead for us. Paul's description fits us today too.

But here is the amazing thing about Paul's description. Having just given a discouraging description about the difficult times ahead, he added in verse 5, **“having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.”** What makes Paul's description so powerful is that **“the appearance of godliness”** cannot refer to non-Christians. Paul would not refer to non-Christians as having **“the appearance of godliness.”** In fact, he referred to non-Christians and their various religions as “ungodliness,” as he did in Romans 1. So, if Paul was not referring to non-Christians in our text, he must be referring to Christians. Thus, Boice says, “In other words, the problem Paul is describing is not that the world will be

evil in the final days before Christ's return but that the church will be like the world, as it is today. The church will be indistinguishable from the world and will be equally corrupt, at least when you look beneath the surface."³

So, what was Timothy to do when facing difficult times ahead? Would the Apostle Paul give Timothy some master key that would unlock the secrets to a highly effective ministry?

Yes, Paul did give Timothy a key for effective ministry. It was a key that Timothy had all along.

II. We Firmly Believe God's Word (3:10-17)

And second, we firmly believe God's word.

Paul's key for ministry was nothing other than the word of God. He said to Timothy in verses 14-15, **"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 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."** There it is! **The sacred writings**, God's word, the Scripture contains everything we need God to tell us for faith and life.

Now, let's notice how God's word is sufficient in just two key areas.

A. *God's Word Is Sufficient for Evangelism*

First, God's word is sufficient for evangelism.

In our day, we have a proliferation of "seeker-driven" churches. These are churches that present the gospel to non-Christians in order to convert them to Christ. Their services are professionally choreographed with concert-like music, colorful stage lighting, moving testimonies, and emotional appeals. However, the

³ James Montgomery Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?*, 74.

only way the Holy Spirit works to regenerate sinners is by the word of God, as the Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 1:23, “You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.”

Let’s consider Jesus and his ministry for a moment. Jesus is introduced in the Gospel of Mark as follows, “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel’” (Mark 1:14–15). Mark introduced Jesus as a preacher, and Jesus’ message was the gospel. That is, Jesus’ message was the good news about how sinners could become part of the kingdom of God. If someone said, “How do enter the kingdom of God?” the answer was, “Repent and believe in the gospel.”

That is the same message we tell people today. In order to enter the kingdom of God, a person must repent of sin and believe the good news that Jesus saves sinners.

As one continues reading in Mark’s Gospel, we read that Jesus went into a synagogue on the Sabbath and began to teach there. Mark said that Jesus “was *teaching*,” how the people “were astonished at his *teaching*, for he *taught* them as one who had authority,” and how they were all amazed, and asked, “What is this? A new *teaching* with authority!” (Mark 1:21, 22, 27). We should be getting Mark’s point: Jesus came as a preacher, and he was preaching the word of God.

Next, Mark tells us that Peter’s mother-in-law lay ill with a fever. In those days before antibiotics, a fever was a serious problem. Jesus was told about her, and he went to her house and healed her. By evening, the whole city came to Jesus in order to be healed. Perhaps several hundred people were healed.

The next morning, Jesus went out to desolate place, and there he prayed. Apparently, by now a very large crowd had gathered in order to be healed by Jesus. When the disciples saw the large

crowd, they went looking for Jesus because they knew it was his practice to pray early in the morning. When they finally found him, they said to him, “Everyone is looking for you” (1:37).

One can almost imagine Peter, speaking on behalf of the disciples, saying to Jesus, “Jesus, I know you think that prayer is important, and that you want to preach. We believe that too because you have taught us to preach and to pray. But I want to point something out to you that you may have missed: Yesterday morning, when you were in the synagogue, you had a decent response. But there were only twenty people present. We counted them. However, in the afternoon, when you began to heal people, hundreds responded. And this morning, there is an even larger crowd than yesterday! We think you really hit upon the right key to successful evangelism. People love the healings. So, please go back down there and heal the people. If you keep this up, you will really bring in God’s kingdom.”

Do you remember Jesus’ reply? Jesus said, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, *for that is why I came out*” (1:38). Isn’t that interesting? Jesus was refusing to carry out a healing ministry at that moment. Did he not care about sick people? No. He continued healing in other places. However, Jesus did not want his healing ministry to eclipse his teaching ministry. According to Jesus, his preeminent ministry was to proclaim the word of God.

Throughout the Bible, and indeed throughout history, God has repeatedly shown that his word is sufficient for evangelism.

B. God’s Word Is Sufficient for Cultural Transformation

And second, God’s word is sufficient for cultural transformation.

Our culture is declining, and it is declining rapidly. For example, less than five years ago United States federal law defined

marriage for federal purposes as the union of one man and one woman, and allowed states to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages granted under the laws of other states. Today, same-sex marriage is the law of the land.⁴

So, if we want to impact the culture, how do we do so? Do we set up political action committees? Do we promote social justice teams? What do we do to see culture transformed? I am arguing that we impact our culture by the teaching and practice of the word of God. Why? Because God's word is sufficient for cultural transformation. James Montgomery Boice illustrates for us:

Here is a particularly striking example. In 1535 the Council of Two Hundred, which governed the city of Geneva, Switzerland, decided to break with Catholicism and align the city with the Protestant Reformation. They had very little idea what that meant. Up to this point the city had been notorious for its riots, gambling, indecent dancing, drunkenness, adultery, and other vices. The citizens of Geneva would literally run around the streets naked, singing indecent songs and blaspheming God. They expected this state of affairs to continue after they had become Protestants, and the Council did not know what to do. It had passed regulation after regulation designed to restrain vice and remedy the situation. They thought becoming Protestant would solve the problem. But that did not do any good either. Genuine moral change never comes from the top down by law, but from the bottom up through a transformed people. Geneva's morals continued to decline.

But the Council did one thing right. They invited John Calvin to become Geneva's chief pastor and preacher. He arrived in August of 1536, a year after the change. He was ignored at first, even by the Council. He was not even paid the first year. Besides, his first preaching proved so unpopular that he was dismissed in early 1538 and went to Strasbourg, where he was very happy. He had no desire to go back to Geneva. Yet, when the situation in Geneva continued to deteriorate, public opinion turned to him

⁴ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defense_of_Marriage_Act.

again and, driven by a sense of duty, Calvin returned. It was September 13, 1541.

Calvin had no weapon but the Bible. From the very first, his emphasis had been on Bible teaching, and he returned to it now, picking up precisely where he had left off three and a half years earlier. Calvin preached from the Bible every day, and under the power of that preaching the city began to be transformed. As the people of Geneva acquired knowledge of God's Word and were changed by it, the city became, as John Knox called it later, a New Jerusalem from which the gospel spread to the rest of Europe, England, and the New World. This change made other changes possible. One historian wrote:

Cleanliness was practically unknown in towns of his generation and epidemics were common and numerous. He moved the Council to make permanent regulations for establishing sanitary conditions and supervision of markets. Beggars were prohibited from the streets, but a hospital and poorhouse were provided and well conducted. Calvin labored zealously for the education of all classes and established the famous Academy, whose influence reached all parts of Europe and even to the British Isles. He urged the council to introduce the cloth and silk industry and thus laid the foundation for the temporal wealth of Geneva. This industry...proved especially successful because Calvin, through the gospel, created within the individual the love of work, honesty, thrift and cooperation. He taught that capital was not an evil thing, but the blessed result of honest labor and that it could be used for the welfare of mankind. Countries under the influence of Calvinism were invariably connected with growing industry and wealth.... It is not mere coincidence that religious and political liberty arose in those countries where Calvinism had penetrated most deeply.

There probably has never been a clearer example of extensive moral and social reform than the transformation of Geneva under the ministry of John Calvin, and it was accomplished almost entirely by the preaching of God's word.⁵

⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?*, 83-84.

John Calvin understood what Paul was saying to Timothy. Paul exhorted Timothy to continue on the path of ministry because **“from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”** (3:15). Why is the word of God able to do that? God’s word is able to do that because **“all Scripture is breathed out by God”** (3:16a). That is, the Scripture is the very word of God, and therefore it carries within it the authority and power of God. Moreover, the word of God is sufficient **“and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work”** (3:16b-17).

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed 2 Timothy 3:1-17, we should believe that Scripture is able to accomplish what God says it will do.

Psalm 19:7–11 says, “The law of the Lord is *perfect*, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is *sure*, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are *right*, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is *pure*, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is *clean*, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are *true*, and *righteous* altogether. More to be *desired* are they than gold, even much fine gold; *sweeter* also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant *warned*; in keeping them there is great *reward*.” The word of God is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true, righteous, desired, sweeter, and rewarding.

Let us be people of the Book. Let us believe that God’s word is indeed sufficient to accomplish what God says it will do. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org