

“The Authority of Scripture Alone”

2 Timothy 3:10-17

500 years ago on October 31st, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses; 95 statements that challenged the teaching of the Roman Church (to which he belonged) that contradicted the teaching of Scripture. How did he come to this point? When Luther entered the monastery he flung himself into every religious exercise.

He plunged into prayer, fasting, and ascetic practices—going without sleep, enduring bone-chilling cold without a blanket, and flagellating himself. As he later commented, "If anyone could have earned heaven by the life of a monk, it was I."

But as a professor at the University of Wittenberg it was Luther's job to teach Bible, even though he actually had not come to believe that the Words of Scripture point to salvation by faith not by works. It was when he was teaching Romans 1 he could not get past 1:17 where it says the *“righteous will live by faith”* He himself knew he wasn't righteous nor was anyone. So how can anyone live by faith since no one is righteous? Then as he read Romans he realized that God declares us righteous through faith in Jesus, not by any works we had done. This was around 1514.

Now he ravenously studied the Word of God and the more he studied the more he saw the unbiblical teachings of the church. That the church was not defined by apostolic succession; that salvation came through faith not the sacraments and that forgiveness of sins could not be bought through indulgences granted by the church but only through confessing them to God through Jesus. Luther's challenge to the church with his 95 theses was to reform her back to what the Word of God said. The debate never happened. It caused uproar in the Roman church. Luther was eventually expelled and was persecuted for his teachings. Luther then translated the Bible into German to get the bible into the hands of the everyday person (thanks now to the new invention of Guttenberg's printing press) and preached and wrote extensively (much in hiding) pointing out what the Bible says against what the church was teaching.

As the Reformation grew over time it became defined by the 5 Solas; Sola being the Latin for 'alone'. Scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone, Jesus alone for God's glory alone. This morning we want to look at Sola Scriptura, that the Scriptures (not a church or denomination or group of people) have sole authority over a church, a denomination and every person. A good place to understand this is in 2 Tim. 3:10-17.

Timothy, the elder/pastor of the church body in the city of Ephesus, was having problems caused by people who were teaching stories, myth and traditions that contradicted Scripture. So Paul encourages Timothy by telling him the Word of God will always come under attack right up until the last days (3:1-9) but that it will withstand all attacks since it is God's very words. I want to start with vv.16-17, what Paul teaches about Scripture and then look back at vv.10-15 on what that means for you and me today.

2 Tim. 3:16-17 stands as a pillar when it comes to defining the authority of Scripture.

¹⁶ *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,* ¹⁷ *so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Why then is Scripture all authoritative, above all human opinions and judgments?

Scripture is All Authoritative Because God is Speaking **(3:16a)**

The word inspired is a unique word that only appears here. It means "God breathed". These words were breathed out by God through the Holy Spirit. In 2 Peter 1:21 we read

²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Since God is eternal, so are His words/Scripture. We read in Heb. 4

¹² For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Notice how the author of Hebrews links the eternality of the Word of God with the authority of God. Since the Word is alive God lays our souls bare through the Word of God, meaning God has sovereignty over our souls. Luther sought to reform the Roman church which taught that the leadership alone had authority over the Word of God and they alone would interpret to people what God said. Beware of any institution that claims it has authority over the word of God or that its traditions are more authoritative than God and His Word. Luther knew the freedom of the power of the Word of God and was willing to suffer for getting the word into the hands of the people. Less than 20 years later William Tyndale would secretly translate the Bible into English, for which he was arrested and burned alive at the stake.

Paul was warning Timothy, as well as all future generations of church leaders, beware of those who place themselves in authority over God's Word, as if they alone can tell you what it says. God speaks directly by His Spirit to us through the Word so that each of us would understand as Luther did, none of us are righteous of our own but can only come to God believing by faith that what His word says about our sinfulness is true, and our damnation is deserved unless we repent of our sins and accept Jesus alone as the mediator between God and us because He is became the perfect sacrifice which appeased God for the punishment of our sins.

Paul wrote in Rom. 15:4

⁴ For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Every generation can say that because God's word is alive that it speaks authoritatively to each generation about who God is and who we are, sinners in need of saving. When we die the Word of God will be used as the authority by which we believed God and accepted Christ or not. When Jesus tells about the rich man who dies at whose gate the poor man Lazarus begged at and now the rich man is suffering in the eternal fires of hell, the rich man asks Abraham to

send Lazarus to my family, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹ "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them. ³⁰ "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' ³¹ "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Rejecting the word of God means rejecting the authority of God. But the Word doesn't only have authority over our eternal destiny; it has practical daily implications as well. Paul goes on to tell Timothy,

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The word useful means 'beneficial'. It will benefit us not only in determining our eternal home but in doing what pleases God now.

Scripture is All Authoritative because it Speaks to our Needs **(3:16b-17)**

The purpose of Scripture is to equip us to serve others through doing God's good for them. How so? He lists 4 ways. First, useful for teaching. If we're going to know how to do God's good in serving others

We need to learn about God (v.16b)

'Doctrine' or 'teaching' is the knowledge about God. We can't know how God wants us to treat others if we don't know how God treats us. God is merciful and gracious and loving and just. We are made in his image. We are to reflect Him to the world. To do that I need to study God; I need to learn about His attributes, His qualities, the way He treats me so I can treat others as He does me. If God extends new mercies and grace to you and me every day, guess what we're to extend to others every day? New mercies and grace! Jesus taught us to forgive without limits. Why? Because he forgives limitlessly. But if we're not learning what God says individually on our own or collectively with each other in Bible studies then we are not equipping ourselves to serve God. We don't learn for information [that only leads to arrogance] we learn for transformation (ourselves first and others second).

While studying Scripture we learn what's not true. "All scripture is useful for rebuking ". There's 2 ways that works.

We need to rebuke what's not true and be rebuked about our sin (v.16c)

We're not perfect and the Word of God points out our sins. When rebuked for our sin we need to confess it and ask forgiveness so we can receive forgiveness from God who is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

But there's another way the Word of God rebukes and that is when we study the Word of God we will be equipped to rebuke what isn't truth. This is what Luther and Zwingli and Calvin and Tyndale and so many other Reformers did. They exposed the untruths of the church and by rebuking them tried to help change them. But they didn't want to reform. This is also the context of 2 Tim. Paul told Timothy early on to guard the good deposit of the gospel (1:14), avoid the godless chatter of the false teachers (2:16-17) and to preach the Word through gentle rebuke, correction and encouragement because too many people only want their ears tickled (4:3-4).

It's not enough to be rebuked for our sin or rebuke others but we need to know what needs correcting. Correction shows,

We need to be restored so we won't sin (as much) (v.16d)

Most of us know we have sin issues but we haven't developed disciplined ways of stopping when tempted or how to avoid sinful temptations or even how to turn people in the right direction after they have sinned. As parents you don't just tell your children what's wrong and not restore them with forgiveness and show them what appropriate behaviour looks like? You want to correct/change the sinful behaviour so it happens less and less. The Scriptures show us how to avoid sin. *"Thy Word have I hid in my heart so I might not sin against thee"* (Ps. 119:11).

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for . . . training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

We need to be trained to live right so we can serve others

Children don't grow on their own. They need to be fed and loved and as they get older trained in what good behaviour is and what is not. None of us would leave a child on his/her own to grow and mature but we often do it to believers. We're all sinners by default. When we come to know God we need to be trained in how to live for God. What is right living and what is wrong living? Serving others does not come naturally. We have to be trained on how to do good works so that the body is trained in righteousness together. Jesus took 12 men and spent 3 years with them, training them in prayer, in understanding Scripture, in learning about God and in serving the poor and needy. Then they trained others as the church grew. Acts 2:42 says the early church,

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

And as they were learning and growing what happened? They served each other:

⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,

Scripture is all authoritative because these are the very words of God who continually speaks to our needs. We need to know this because as Paul pointed out to Timothy and reminds us in vv.10-13,

Many Reject the Authority of Scripture so Expect Persecution (3:10-13)

Timothy was experiencing a lot of hardship because he stood behind the authority of the Word of God. That's what ch. 3 is all about. In v.10 Paul writes,

¹⁰ You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹ persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. ¹² In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Paul held to the authority of the word of God. He reminds Timothy of the persecutions and suffering he experienced while on his 1st missionary journey recorded in Acts 13-14. In Lystra, Paul was actually stoned for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and left for dead. But God rescued him and the next day he left for Derbe. Why does Paul mention Lystra specifically? Because in Derbe Paul met Timothy and trained him in the Word.

Earlier in the letter Paul encouraged Timothy not to be ashamed of the gospel or afraid to suffer for the gospel. God is with them and people will reject the authority of the Word of God. We have to expect it. Peter would write in 1 Pet. 4:12

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

This shouldn't surprise us because we are standing up to the authority of the Word of God and people who deny God deny his authority for their lives. So what should we do? What did Paul tell Timothy to do in his hostile environment to the authority of the word of God?

Continue Growing in the Scriptures because They Alone **Make us Wise (3:14-15)**

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Elsewhere Paul told believers in 1 Cor. 1 that

the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.²⁶ Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.²⁸ God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,²⁹ so that no one may boast before him.

Reading the Scriptures to understand Jesus alone can save you is the wisest thing you can do. Training our own children in the Word of God is the wisest thing we can do for our children and grandchildren. Even though the world opposes the authority of the Word of God, it alone reveals the gospel which alone is the power of God for salvation. The world calls us fools but God calls us wise since we believe His Word alone will reveal every person's eternal destiny, based on whether they accepted God and His Word by faith or not. The Reformation is not over; it's ongoing.

It should be our prayer and purpose to reform a lost world that desperately needs hope and joy that can only be found as God reveals Himself in His Word.

It should be our prayer and desire to see all those who call themselves "Christian" to make sure they are following Christ and His Word, not their own or someone else's ideas about what God's Word says.

It should be our personal desire to keep reforming ourselves by the Word of God, growing in holiness and righteousness so we're thoroughly equipped to serve one another.

Many followers of Jesus in Luther's day were persecuted and some were killed just so we could have our own Bibles. Have we taken that freedom for granted? Is the Bible our personal authority for our life as God intends for it to be? May we not look at the Reformation as a past event but an ongoing movement with the baton passed faithfully in our hands for this generation. Let's show the people of today that the Bible is still God's authority for us so that they will come to know it is for them also.

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