

The Origin and Profit of Scripture

2 Timothy 3:15b-17

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn to HCC on 9/18/2011

Introduction

- ❖ Earlier this summer I introduced you to Charles Templeton. Back in the 1940's, Templeton was a popular preacher and mass evangelist who partnered with Billy Graham to carry out evangelistic crusades. And from all appearances, he was the next big thing in the evangelical world. Some would have argued that he even overshadowed Billy Graham.
 - But unlike Graham, a model of Christian perseverance, Charles Templeton eventually deserted the faith and became a staunch agnostic. In his book, *"Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith"*, he explains that it all began with a few questions and doubts.
- ❖ He had a hard time reconciling the Bible with the findings of modern science OR the existence of evil and suffering with the Bible's portrayal of God OR how the Bible can command us to love and forgive but, at the same time, God can send people to hell.
 - Now I'm sure all of us have wrestled with these same questions at some point in our faith journey. And I assume most of us here have come out on the other side with a more robust faith in God and the Gospel of Jesus. So clearly having questions and doubts in general does not determine whether or not you'll keep or desert the faith.
- ❖ But there is one thing in particular, that if you begin to question and doubt, it will set you on a path that opens up the real danger of swerving from the truth and leaving the faith. That is, ***do you question or doubt if the Bible is really the Word of God?***
- ❖ Templeton used to believe the Bible was the very Word of God, but once he gave up that conviction, rejecting the Christian faith became the next logical response. Listen to how he describes the Bible from an agnostic's perspective, *"The agnostic asserts that, rather than the Word of God, the Holy Bible is only one of many holy books in which various peoples at various times in human history have set down their beliefs about the source of being and the meaning and purpose of life. The agnostic asserts further that the Old Testament is simply the compilation of various attempts by a Middle Eastern Semitic people (the Jews) to preserve in written form their beliefs about the nature of God, his creation of the world, and his dealings with his "Chosen People." He asserts that the New Testament is essentially the collected record of the conclusions of a number of Palestinian Jews concerning Jesus of Nazareth, including their belief that he was the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity."*
- ❖ In other words, for Templeton, the Bible is just a human book that contains the human effort of an ancient people to wrestle with humanity's deepest questions. But if that's all the Bible is, if it is just an ancient book of ancient wisdom, then we're free to pick and choose what we want to believe, if it so happens to fit our modern values and assumptions. Unfortunately that's how many people treat the Bible.
- ❖ Friends, we live in a pluralistic society where you rub shoulders every day with people of other religions and worldviews. And this is a permissive society where the idea of the Truth has been replaced with the embrace of many truths.

- In such an environment, it can be hard, as Christians, to firmly believe what Scripture teaches to be true, to continue in sound, biblical doctrine, especially if it goes against the grain of popular teaching and trends.

Context

- ❖ But we're not alone in this struggle. Timothy was in the same boat. If you think our society is religiously diverse and pluralistic, one could argue that first-century Ephesus was even more so. The church in Ephesus was surrounded by synagogues and pagan temples dedicated to a multitude of Greek gods and goddesses. Artemis being the most prominent in the city.
 - Timothy had to contend for the faith, once for all delivered, in a hostile environment where false teachers were challenging sound doctrine and harming the faith of others.
- ❖ And so throughout the course of this letter, the Paul has written to Timothy to not be ashamed of the Gospel (1:8), to follow the pattern of sound words he learned from him (1:13), to guard those gospel doctrines (1:14), to endure suffering for it (2:12), to rightly handle the worth of truth (2:15), and in chapter 3:14 to "*continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed*". That is, to continue holding firm to your core beliefs.
- ❖ In vv14-15, Paul gives Timothy two reasons to continue in his core beliefs. 1) Because of Timothy's personal familiarity with those who taught him these beliefs. 2) Because of his personal familiarity with their source of teaching, that is, the 'sacred writings' (a technical term referring to the Jewish scriptures, the Old Testament).
 - Well in today's text, vv16-17, Paul goes on to bolster the credibility of Scripture in order to give Timothy even more reason to tighten his grip around Scripture and to hold firm to what it teaches.

Scripture's Unique Origin From God

- ❖ Paul's first point is this: **1) Continue believing what Scripture teaches since you trust its unique origin from God.** In other words, assuming you know and believe where Scripture comes from, you will be strengthened to hold more firmly to what it teaches. Look at v16 again, "*All Scripture is breathed out by God.*"
- ❖ Now let's start by considering that phrase '*breathed out by God*'. In Greek it's just one word, *theopneustos*. It comes from the word *theos* meaning 'God' and *pneustos* which carries the root word for 'to breathe'. Taken together the word literally means 'God-breathed'. **So Paul is essentially saying is that all Scripture originates from the breath (mouth) of God.**
 - Now in some older translations, *theopneustos* is translated as '*inspired by God*' or '*given by inspiration of God*'. Perhaps you've heard of the theological term 'divine inspiration', which describes this idea that Scripture comes from the breath of God.
- ❖ Now it's a good term, but the word itself could give off the wrong impression. You see, the word 'inspiration' is derived from the Latin for "to breathe or blow *into*". So to say God inspired Scripture, you might get the impression that Scripture is something that previously

existed (written by the hands of man) and then God inspires it -- then he breathes *into* it. That would mean Scripture was first the mere words of man, but then at a later point, upon inspiration, it became the words of God.

- ❖ But that's the opposite of what Paul is saying. When he says "*all Scripture is theopneustos*", he's implying that God's breath actually brought Scripture into existence. **To be more precise, instead of saying God inspired Scripture, we should say he exhaled Scripture.** That is why the ESV translates it as "*breathed out by God*".
- ❖ B.B. Warfield made a helpful comparison between the origin of Scripture and the origin of creation itself, namely that both came into existence by the breath of God. In the Old Testament, the 'breath of God' was a symbol of his almighty creative power. God could simply speak and bring things into existence.
 - So we read in **Psalm 33:6**, "*By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.*" All the starry hosts in the heavens came into existence by the breath of his mouth, specifically by the power of his Spirit. If you recall, in the beginning, we read that the Spirit of God is hovering right before he begins to speak things into existence (Gen. 1:2). It's no coincidence that the Hebrew word for 'breath' is the same word for 'spirit'.
 - So by using the term *theopneustos*, Paul is saying that, just as with creation, God spoke Scripture into existence by the power of his breath/Spirit.
- ❖ Now granted, in v16, Paul is not fleshing out a full theory of inspiration. He is only addressing God's contribution to the origin of Scripture. The human component is not even mentioned.
 - You would have to consider passages like **2 Peter 1:21**, which says "*For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*"
 - So Peter, along with Paul, is affirming that all Scripture (the 'prophecy' Peter is referring to is the '*prophecy of Scripture*', see 1:20) ultimately originates, not in the will of man, but in the will of God and is communicated through his breath to human authors who were carried along by the Holy Spirit to record God-inspired words on the pages of Scripture.
- ❖ Unlike what Islam teaches concerning the *Quran* or what Mormonism teaches concerning the *Book of Mormon*, Christianity does not teach that the Bible was simply dictated, word for word, by God to human authors, who simply acted as stenographers.
 - If you just read Luke's introduction to his Gospel, you'll quickly realize that the human authors of Scripture were not mindless puppets or human keyboards.
 - In **Luke 1:1-4**, we see that he researched the events of Jesus' life. He borrowed from other sources and eyewitness accounts, and he even expressed his motivation for writing a Gospel. "*It seemed good to me.*" The means Luke had his own authorial intent behind what he wrote.

- ❖ My point is that Luke's authorial intent should not be seen as separate or opposed to God's intent. They are one and the same. **Scripture has a dual authorship.** On one hand, the biblical authors were consciously engaged in the writing process, incorporating their unique personalities and styles.
 - But ultimately the Spirit of God was superintending the entire process, so that every word recorded in Scripture was the word he intended to record AND every meaning intended by the human author God intended to mean.

- ❖ **One helpful analogy is to compare the Written Word with the Incarnate Word.** Consider how Jesus, the Incarnate Word, has two natures, one divine and one human, perfectly contained in one person. In similar fashion, the Written Word has two authorships, one divine and one human, perfectly contained in one book.
 - Apply it further. When Mary delivered Jesus through a natural birth, the casual observer would have thought Jesus was simply human, but in fact we know that he was ultimately conceived by the Holy Spirit.
 - Similarly, the biblical authors recorded Scripture through the natural writing process, so the casual observer might think the Bible is simply a human book, but in reality we know that it ultimately originates from the mouth of God by his breath, his Spirit.

- ❖ **So just as you cannot parse between Jesus' humanity and his divinity, you cannot parse between a purely human thought in Scripture and a purely divine thought.** You cannot claim that certain passages like Romans 8, which directly address Christian salvation, are *theopneustos*, but then consider less relevant passages like the genealogies in Numbers or the holiness codes of Leviticus or the battle narratives of Joshua or Judges as simply human records of ancient history and ancient practices.
 - When Paul writes "*All Scripture is theopneustos*" he means all. All the words of Scripture are God-breathed, not just the ones we deem to be important or relevant.

- ❖ Well that raises another question. When Paul says 'all Scripture' -- the word 'all' is clear -- but what is not so clear is the word 'Scripture'. What exactly is Paul referring to? Well read in light of v15, we know he must be referring to the 'sacred writings' that Timothy grew up learning, that is the Jewish Scripture. So 'God-breathed' would apply to the Old Testament.
 - *But what about the New?* Now obviously Paul could not have had in mind all 27 books of the New Testament since some had yet to be written. But he very well could have meant to apply 'God-breathed' to his own teaching and that of other apostles -- which comprise the New Testament.

- ❖ I think this is likely because there are other places in his letters where Paul puts apostolic teaching, including his own, on par with prophetic teaching in the Old Testament. For example, in a few places in this letters, Paul says he expects that particular letter to be read aloud in the Christian congregation (Co1. 4:16; 1 Thes. 5:27), that is, alongside the Old Testament passage that was customarily read in their corporate worship.

- ❖ There is also one instance in **2 Peter 3:15-16**, where Peter, in reference to Paul's letters, actually lumps them in with the '*other Scriptures*' (a clear reference to the Old Testament). And there is another place in **1 Timothy 5:18** where Paul backs up a point he just made with Scripture quoting two verses, one from Deuteronomy (25:4) and another from Jesus' words in Luke (10:7). And he introduced both verses with the words, "*For the Scripture says*".
 - My point is that there is good reason to assume Paul had both the teachings of God's prophets and God's apostles in mind when he said "*all Scripture*" and therefore we can apply *theopneustos* to both the Old and New. Both are divinely inspired by God.
- ❖ *What is the point of all this?* Remember Paul is fortifying Timothy's confidence in Scripture, so that he firmly holds to all that it teaches even in the face of persecution and opposition.
 - In the same way, by grasping and truth in Scripture's unique origin from the breathe of God, you're strengthened in your conviction that the Bible -- the whole Bible -- ultimately originates from the mouth of God as the Word of God.
- ❖ **And if the Bible is God's own Word, then everything it teaches must be carefully affirmed and obeyed – even if it is unpopular!** Friends, there are a number of things the Bible teaches that stands in direct opposition to the values of our contemporary culture. I ask you: *Where will you stand?* Above the inspired Word, standing in judgment over it? Or under the inspired Word, bowed in submission to its authority and truthfulness as the Word of God?
 - Now granted, this convictions must be coupled with proper principles of biblical interpretation, or otherwise, we risk the danger of drawing inaccurate interpretations and theological conclusions from Scripture, and then absolutizing them by an insistence that "*The Word of God says it!*"
- ❖ We need to learn how to faithfully interpret Scripture within its context, to understand its various genres, to recognize figurative language, to discern between descriptive and prescriptive passages. But once we have a sound interpretation of a text, then we need to stand firm and hold tight to what it teaches, to what we have learned and firmly believed.
 - Friends, all Scripture is God-breathed. This simple fact has enormous relevance to each of us, because, the truth is, Scripture is only profitable to man because it is inspired by God.

Scripture's Unique Profit For Man

- ❖ That leads to our second point. **2) Continue believing what Scripture teaches since you understand its unique profit for man.** In other words, by understanding why God gave us Holy Scripture, you will have more reason to study it, to cherish it and to hold more firmly to what it teaches.
 - Now there are two purposes of Scripture, two ways it profits mankind. First, Scripture leads you to salvation in Jesus, and second, it leads you through life in Jesus.

- ❖ Let's consider the first by reading vv14-15. *“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.”*
 - That last part in v15 is really what I wanted to focus on. The sacred writings are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

- ❖ Take careful note that this wisdom that Scripture gives is a wisdom with a goal in mind -- a goal overlooked by many who study the Bible. There are bible scholars out there with PhDs who can lecture on the most technical details in biblical scholarship, and yet they have no faith in Jesus.
 - They would be considered wise for lecturing on the Bible, but they have not been made wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

- ❖ Friends, I love Scripture, but I know how easy it is for my sinful heart to love reading and studying the Scriptures more than knowing and communing with the Savior to which the Scriptures are pointing.
 - Jesus condemned the religious of his day for doing just that -- for diligently studying the Scriptures trying to find eternal life but missing the fact that the Scriptures bear witness about Him (cf. Jn. 5:39).
 - So Scripture is “able to” accomplish something unique and significant. But it's not your salvation. Knowledge of Scripture is not able to save you, but it is able to lead you to the One who can.

- ❖ That's the profit of Scripture. It lead us to salvation in Jesus. But that's not all, it is also the guide that leads us through life in Jesus. Scripture makes us wise for living out the realities of our salvation in relationship with the Savior.
 - Look again vv16-17, *“All Scripture is breathed out by God 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.”*

- ❖ Notice Paul describes four ways in which Scripture profits us, which can be viewed as two pairs. *‘For teaching’* and *‘for reproof’* is one pair. They have to do with our convictions. *‘For correction’* and *‘for training in righteousness’* is another pair, which relate to our conduct.

- ❖ Let's consider the first pair. Paul says **a) Scripture is profitable ‘for teaching’ and ‘for reproof’**. In other words, Scripture informs and shapes our convictions by teaching us sound doctrine. And on the flip side, Scripture exposes any bad doctrine we might hold and sets straight any crooked convictions we might have.

- ❖ Friends, sound doctrine is biblical doctrine. So let me ask you: *Are your core beliefs grounded in Scripture?* Can you support your views with Scripture verses properly interpreted within their context? Don't be satisfied with groundless convictions you simply adopted from others without searching the Scriptures to see if things are so (Acts 17:11).
 - But if your core beliefs are found to be grounded in a divinely inspired text, a text that was breathed out by God, then you should have even greater confidence to continue in them, knowing that whatever it teaches is founded upon the unchanging, rock-solid truth of God.

- ❖ Now let's consider the second pair: **b) Scripture is profitable 'for correction' and 'for training in righteousness'**. That means if you're reading Scripture as the Word of God and according to its purposes, you can't be a passive reader. It's not like reading a normal book!
 - When you read and study a book, it is usually there to inform you with data. You read it. You study it. But Scripture is unique, being the very Word of God. You not only read and study it. It reads and studies you. You don't just analyze and exegete the text. The text analyzes and exegetes you.
 - So as you read it, as you hear it preached, the Bible doesn't just teach you about sin. It exposes *your* sin. It doesn't just teach God's laws. It demands that *you* obey them. It doesn't just record facts about Jesus. It introduces *you* to him and calls *you* to receive his grace by faith.

- ❖ The Bible is not just a book of history or philosophy or ethics. Fundamentally, the Bible is God's inspired Word to be believed and obeyed. Perhaps this is why so many people reject it. Most books just offer its readers information or advice. You can take it or leave it. You can pick and choose what fits your values and worldview.
 - But the Bible makes demands upon its readers. It issues forth universal commands and makes absolute truth claims. It commands us to submit to God's loving rule. Scripture describes exactly how we ought to think and feel and conduct ourselves before God and man.

- ❖ *But to what aim?* V17, "*that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*" The 'man of God' could refer to all Christians in general or it could refer to a messenger of God, harkening back to Old Testament prophets like Moses, Samuel, and Elijah who spoke the Word of God.
 - Contextually, Paul was probably thinking of men with teaching responsibilities in the church like Timothy. Scripture is directly profitable to equip them for such ministry. But Scripture is equally profitable to equip every believer for every good work.

- ❖ I want to make this clear: **When Paul says 'good work' he doesn't mean church work.** Many Christians think Scripture is there to equip you for every church work, for teaching Sunday School, for leading a bible study, for preaching a sermon, etc. But they don't see how Scripture could be used to equip them in their vocations, for their responsibilities at home, at school, at work.

- ❖ But while every good work would include church work, it is in no way limited to serving God in the church. ***‘Every good work’ is broad enough to include our daily duties and responsibilities.***
 - For me personally, I read my Bible and I try to soak in it because I believe Scripture is able to equip me for being a godly husband to my wife, for being a good father to my daughter, for being a loving and humble shepherd to this congregation.
 - Scripture instructs me on how to carry out my duties in a God-honoring, God-glorifying manner. It also convicts me and corrects me when I am failing in my duty, when I dishonor God, when I am harsh with my wife, when I am inattentive to my daughter, when I am selfish and unwilling to lay down my life for my flock.

- ❖ But most of all, Scripture reminds me that the God who inspired it, this loving and gracious God, has sent his only Son to die for my sins, to atone for my failures, by laying down his own life on the cross. And Jesus my Savior lives, having risen from the dead, that I too might live with him in eternal life.
 - Because Scripture profits me in this way AND because it is the very Word of God originating from his breath, I am encouraged and strengthen to continue holding firm to all that it teaches. I pray you are too.