

Essentials – Is the Bible Good?

2 Timothy 3:14-17

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



Two weeks ago, we embarked on our fall teaching series through the EFCA's Statement of Faith. As an EFCA church, this is our statement of faith (SOF). The first article of faith that we examined was on God. This week, we will look at Article #2 – The Bible.

Article #2 - "We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises."

2 Timothy is one of Paul's most personal letters. Paul wrote it to a dear friend whom he both mentored and commissioned into ministry. Pastoring in Ephesus was no easy task. Ephesus was a city of wealth and luxury, idolatry and pleasure, and religion and philosophy. The simple reality is that Timothy faced challenge after challenge trying to pastor the church there. So Paul offers some advice in the face of the challenges. The primary advice is that Timothy is to hold to and preach the Word. We see that because the Word of God is inspired, it is valuable and sacred. (Ref. Passages: *II Timothy 2:1-2, 15; 3:14-16*) In this letter, Paul implores Timothy to not be ashamed of the gospel; why? Because the Word of God is valuable and sacred. **But is the Word of God, good?** That is a key question, and to answer it, we will look at four statements made by Paul to remind Timothy of its goodness. But first, we have to acknowledge that we have a complicated relationship with the idea of good and goodness. **So let's start there, what is "good" anyway?**

Good: In its adjectival form as an ethical term, *good* means, basically, **morally excellent**. *Goodness*, in turn, means the state or quality of being good. The nature of this moral excellence, however, has been one of the central questions explored by ethicists throughout history. Whereas the focus of the debate in the Greek philosophical tradition has been on the issue of what constitutes a good human, the biblical perspective begins with the moral excellence of God. **As a consequence, Christian ethics does not leave the good at the level of an abstract philosophical concept.** Rather, the ground of goodness is the personal God who is active in human history, who enters into covenant with creation, and who is supremely manifested in Jesus Christ. **This God is the standard for goodness and determines what is the human good.**¹ Sometimes God and his Word is referred to as the *summum bonum*. **A Latin term that means literally "highest good." In ethical theory, the good in relation to which all other values are ordered, or in accordance to which all other values are measured.**²

The simple reality of when it comes to being "good" or what is "good," is that if something or someone is good, it can only exude and exhibit goodness. That is nothing but goodness can come from it or be created by it. Consider in Genesis, when God creates the world and everything in it, he pronounces it, *good*. Why?

¹ Stanley J. Grenz and Jay T. Smith, *Pocket Dictionary of Ethics*, The IVP Pocket Reference Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 47–48.

² Stanley J. Grenz and Jay T. Smith, *Pocket Dictionary of Ethics*, The IVP Pocket Reference Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 114.

Because he who is good, is creating it and therefore, nothing can come from him that is not good. However, for you and me, we have a complicated relationship with this topic. Why? Well, because we aspirational like to think of ourselves as good. But, to be truly good, we must and only ever exude and exhibit goodness. Yet, we are all very aware of the fact that is not true. Why? Because we are very capable of exuding and exhibiting things that are not good. So, if we yearn to be *good*, but can't on our own, what hope is there for us? What source can we turn to for a reformation into goodness? Here is where we examine the Word of God.

1. It is good because it is from God. (v.16a)

- a. **If God is good and his character is revealed in the Bible, therefore, the Bible is good.**
 - i. I.e., If God is good, and his Word comes from him, then his Word is good.
- b. What do we mean by verbal inspiration?
 - i. The question lingers for us, where does Scripture (the Word of God) get its value? Here, Paul answers in 3:14-16, it is from God himself who has breathed the Word into existence. The phrase “breathed out by God” can be a challenging phrase to understand and translate. Is Paul telling Timothy of the inspiration of the Word of God for the first time? No, not likely., for this was a doctrine commonly admitted by Jews. Instead, Timothy is being reminded that the basis of its profitableness lies in its inspired character.³ *Its value and sacred nature are directly tied to the One who inspired it, God.*
 - ii. Though we understand the Bible to be the Word of God, we also affirm that God speaks **“through the words of human authors.”** This is important for our hermeneutical method, for it means that in interpreting the Bible we seek the intent of the human authors as the primary means by which to discover the meaning God intends for us in the biblical text.⁴
 - iii. **With this understanding, divine inspiration does not imply that the Bible was given to us by divine dictation**, as is claimed for the Koran or the Book of Mormon, though in some parts God did communicate in a direct way to the biblical writers. Instead, divine inspiration allows for the full engagement of all the faculties of the human authors. Luke, for example, begins his Gospel by referring to his careful investigation of the facts which he intended to set forth in his book. **When we say that the Bible is a “verbally inspired” book, we mean that God has worked by his Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of the whole personality, life experiences and literary talents of its human authors to produce the very words that God desired to be written to reveal himself and his purposes to human beings.** Peter describes this process as men speaking from God “as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:20-21; Heb. 3:7; cf. Jesus’ reference to David “speaking by the Holy Spirit” in Ps. 110 [Mark 12:36]). Apart from Peter’s description, we have no way of grasping the mysterious concurrence of God’s will working through the human will in producing this divine/human Word.⁵
- c. The challenges facing Timothy. → Pastoring in Ephesus wasn’t easy.
 - i. In 1 Timothy 1:3–7 Timothy is told to ‘command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies’. These persons were apparently desirous of being teachers of the law without understanding it. Much discussion has surrounded the meaning of the word ‘genealogies’ in this passage, but Hort’s conclusion that the Pastorals’ heresies are more closely connected with Jewish

⁴ EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (p. 63). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

⁵ EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (p. 66). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

legend than Greek speculation seems a reasonable explanation of the scant data available.³² The interest in the law in this passage would serve to confirm this conclusion.⁶

- ii. The clearest reality is that Timothy faced significant challenges while trying to pastor the church in Ephesus.
 - 1. Challenges within – False teachers consumed with “endless genealogies.”
 - 2. Outside challenges – Idol worship that was sexual in nature.
 - 3. Cultural challenges – Ephesus was just like so many other Roman-influenced places in the first century, power-hungry, polytheistic, and as a port city, wealthy and filled with luxuries.
 - a. Timothy’s only hope as a pastor was to be able to offer something that was truly good, that is, something that was *summum bonum*.
 - b. **What’s Paul’s answer to this need? → Teach the Word of God → It is *summum bonum*.**

2. It is good because it reveals Jesus. (v. 15)

- a. **If Jesus makes the Father known to us and is the fulfillment of God’s redemptive promise, therefore, the Bible is good.**
 - i. Jesus in his incarnation shows us the Father.
 - 1. **Jn. 1:18 - ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.**
 - 2. **Col. 1:15 - ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.**
 - ii. “In its subjective reality God’s revelation consists of definite signs of its objective reality which are given by God. Among the signs of the objective reality of revelation we have to understand certain definite events and relations and orders within the world in which revelation is an objective reality, and therefore within the world which is also our world, the world of our nature and history. **The special determination of these events and relations and orders is that along with what they are and mean within this world, in themselves, and from the standpoint of immanence, they also have another nature and meaning from the side of the objective reality of revelation, i.e., from the side of the incarnation of the Word.**” ⁷ - Karl Barth
 - 1. Here is what Barth means in this quote. God has made himself known in a number of ways, generally through creation, specifically through the Scriptures, but precisely through his Son, Jesus.
 - 2. It is entirely possible to read God’s Word and come to faith in God because the Scriptures are sufficient and authoritative. However, God in his grace, sent his Son both to redeem humanity, but also as an irrefutable sign of his character and nature.
 - 3. How is the incarnation an irrefutable sign? → Because Jesus as the God-human, lived the life of goodness that we all aspire to but cannot actually do.
- b. Paul tells Timothy that the Word of God leads to a particular end, “wise for salvation.”

⁶ Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 41–42.

⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley, First American edition. (London; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 39–40.

- i. The power of the Scriptures is directed to a particular end, *to make you wise for salvation*. RSV translates this, 'to instruct you for salvation'. The phrase *for salvation (eis sōtērian)* is frequently used in the earlier Epistles of Paul, while the notion of such value attached to the Old Testament is so thoroughly Pauline that Schlatter thinks it is difficult to think of anyone else speaking of it in such terms. That salvation is appropriated only *through faith in Christ Jesus* is also thoroughly Pauline. The mere reading of Scripture is ineffective in securing salvation unless faith is in operation, faith-centered entirely in Christ. This was evident in the case of the unbelieving Jews.⁸
- ii. How does it do this? → It makes clear God's plan for redemption did not change from the OT through the NT and ultimately was fulfilled in and through his Son, Jesus.
 - 1. It also demonstrates the evidence that we can weigh for the Messianic nature of Jesus.
- iii. Paul will go on that this "wise for salvation" has implications for the believer both eternally and in the here and now. That is, we are transformed into the image of the one who is truly good.

3. It is good because it is ethical. (V. 16c)

- a. **If the Bible teaches what is ethically good for all people as determined by a good God and produces goodness, therefore, it is good.**
 - i. **What are ethics?** → Moral philosophy, or the division of philosophy that **involves the study of how humans ought to live**. Ethics focuses on questions of right and wrong, as well as the determination of the human good. If morality involves the actual practice of living out of one's beliefs, then ethics is the study of why these practices are moral or immoral. **Christian ethics, in turn, is the study of how humans ought to live as informed by the Bible and Christian convictions.**⁹
 - ii. **This is a key concept that Paul is driving to Timothy → Don't forget that the Bible comes with ethical implications.**
 - 1. The statement about Scripture is backed up by a fuller explanation of its nature and purpose. **The emphasis is on its value and usefulness for different purposes**, so that it can provide whatever the servant of God needs for doing good.¹⁰
 - 2. It is more likely that **the reference to inspiration is part of what Paul wants to affirm about Scripture in order to defend its universal usefulness.**¹¹
- b. **The Bible doesn't merely tell us what is right and wrong, it leads us into transformation to understanding right from wrong and thus being able to make ethical decisions that love our neighbors and honor God in the tough moments of life.**
 - i. To be clear, our statement about the Bible's authority does not mean that there is no knowledge outside the Bible, nor that the Bible must be invoked to justify every aspect of human knowledge and action. The Bible is authoritative over every realm of human

⁸ Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 180–181.

⁹ Stanley J. Grenz and Jay T. Smith, *Pocket Dictionary of Ethics*, The IVP Pocket Reference Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 35.

¹⁰ I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 790.

¹¹ I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 793.

activity, but, as we have stated, it does not address every realm. There is much that is not revealed in Scripture, from atomic physics to the chemical activity of the brain, that can greatly enrich human life. But nothing outside of Scripture comes to us with the same universally binding divine authority—not church tradition, not any other religious writings, not prophetic utterances, not inner promptings of the Spirit, not scientific theories, not human reason. All of these can be helpful, and Scripture as our “ultimate authority” does not imply that we should try to understand the world, and even the Bible itself, without using all the resources God has made available to us.¹²

- c. **Paul doesn’t want Timothy to miss the facts that the Bible is capable of offering transforming guidance.** The challenges that he is facing not only can be answered by the Bible but through the power of the Holy Spirit, those challenges can be overcome.
 - i. Four spheres are now mentioned in which the usefulness of Scripture can be seen. The first two relate to doctrine and the other two to practice. *Useful for teaching* refers to positive teaching, while *rebuking* represents the negative aspect. The Scripture contains both encouragement and warning, and this double aspect is always present. On the ethical plane, the Scripture provides both *correcting* and *training*, again stressing both negative and positive aspects. All these uses of Scripture were admitted by Judaism; indeed the advanced ethics of the Jews was due to its basis in the Old Testament. Since the Christians took over the same Scriptures, the same profitableness applies. But for them each one of these uses became more comprehensive as the Old Testament teaching was illumined by the life and teaching of Christ.¹³
- d. There is a unique thing that happens when humans gain knowledge of right and wrong, too often instead of being filled with a sense of generosity to give that knowledge away, it puffs us up and causes us to sit in condemning judgment of others.
 - i. Paul reminds Timothy that this is not the purpose or intention of the ethical realities of the Word of God. Instead it is to lead us to a flourishing life.

4. It is good because it leads to human flourishing. (v. 17)

- a. **If the Bible teaches what is ethically good for all people as determined by a good God and produces goodness, therefore, it is good.**
 - i. There is something cold in the reality of simply knowing right and wrong. **Rules by themselves lack relationship.** But, healthy and flourishing relationships need the stability of rules. As the Bible facilitates our transformation in ethical living it does so in a way that enables our relationships and personal lives to truly flourish.
- b. There is a distinct objective in this profitableness of Scripture. (v.17)
 - i. The verse opens with a clause introduced by a word (*hina*) which indicates purpose or result. The Christian minister has in his hands a God-given instrument designed to equip him completely for his work. The phrase *thoroughly equipped* consists of two Greek words, an adjective *artios* which describes a man perfectly adapted for his task, and a cognate verb *exartizō* which adds further emphasis to the same thought. For a parallel use of *good works*, cf. 2:21. The phrase *the man of God* appears to be applied specifically to the Christian teachers, rather than to Christians generally (cf. 1 Tim. 6:11). ‘The man of God is before all the man of the Bible’ (Spicq). There may be an allusion to

¹² EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (p. 78). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

¹³ Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 182.

the work of the prophets in the use of this title, for it was frequently applied to them in the Old Testament. The place of the Bible in the equipping of men for the ministry must always be recognized as the most powerful influence.¹⁴

1. Timothy is reminded that the Scriptures form the basis of his commission, and their nature and role is stated in detail. **Not only do the Scriptures lead to salvation for believers in Christ; their God-inspired character means that they are also able to provide such positive teaching and correctives to evil that the man of God will be prepared for every good task.**¹⁵
2. Paul uses the word *righteousness* here to denote not some intellectual assent to the idea of right and wrong, but that **right** is to be seen in the substance of my life.
 - a. The warning here is that what is right, is not by our own judgment but is to be informed by God and come into alignment with God's prescriptions.
 - b. A caution here: There are many things in our modern world that the Bible doesn't address but that we need to apply the ethical instruction of the Scriptures to in wisdom. It is important for us to step back and not interpret the Bible through the issues of the day, but the issues of the day through the Bible.
- c. **Righteousness, Justice.** In English the terms *righteousness* and *justice* are different words, but in both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament there is only one word group behind these two English terms. (In the Old Testament the terms primarily translate forms of the רָצוּן, H7406, word group, and the New Testament members of the δικαίως (G1469) word group.) Therefore, these two terms will be considered together as speaking of one attribute of God.
 - i. *God's righteousness means that God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the final standard of what is right.*
 - ii. Speaking of God, Moses says, "All his ways are *justice*. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, *just* and *right* is he" (Deut. 32:4). Abraham successfully appeals to God's own character of righteousness when he says, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). God also speaks and commands what is right: "The precepts of the LORD are *right* rejoicing the heart" (Ps. 19:8). And God says of himself, "I the LORD speak the truth, I declare what is *right*" (Isa. 45:19). As a result of God's righteousness, it is necessary that he treat people according to what they deserve. Thus, it is necessary that God punish sin, for it does not deserve reward; it is wrong and deserves punishment.¹⁶
- d. δικαιοσύνη (*dikaiosynē*). n. fem. **righteousness, justice.** *The quality of conforming to a standard or norm, normally carrying an ethical overtone.*¹⁷
 - i. The basic use of *dikaiosynē* in the NT is to describe character and actions characterized by moral integrity as measured by God's revealed will.¹⁸

¹⁴ Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 182–183.

¹⁵ I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 781.

¹⁶ Grudem, W. A. (2004). [*Systematic theology: an introduction to biblical doctrine*](#) (pp. 203–204). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House.

¹⁷ Anderson, G. P. (2014). [Righteousness](#). D. Mangum, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, & R. Hurst (Eds.), *Lexham Theological Wordbook*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

¹⁸ Anderson, G. P. (2014). [Righteousness](#). D. Mangum, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, & R. Hurst (Eds.), *Lexham Theological Wordbook*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

- ii. especially in the letters of Paul, a status of acceptability before God on the basis of faith, the gift resulting from justification (Rom 4:5–9; 5:17; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 3:9; Phil 3:9).¹⁹
- iii. Used 33 times in Romans.
 - 1. 91 times in the NT as a whole.
 - 2. 261 times in the LXX.
- iv. The simple reality is that if the Bible is good and it offers ethical guidance, then that guidance is to be seen in the substance of our lives.
- e. The modern philosopher Miroslav Volf, expresses this very notion when he says,
 - i. **“Enormous problems happen when we exclude our enemy from the community of humans and when we exclude ourselves from the community of sinners – when we forget that our enemy is not a subhuman monster but a human being, when we forget that we are not the perfect good but also flawed persons. By remembering this, our hatred doesn’t kill us or absorb us, and we can actually go out and work for justice.”**²⁰
- Miroslav Volf
 - ii. The question we are left with is, since the Bible is good, does the goodness of the Bible flow from my life?

¹⁹ Anderson, G. P. (2014). [Righteousness](#). D. Mangum, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, & R. Hurst (Eds.), *Lexham Theological Wordbook*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

²⁰ Miroslav Volf – From “Exclusion and Embrace”