

# We Believe – The Bible Our Ultimate Authority 2 Tim. 3:14-17

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



Second 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, primarily 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: // *Timothy 2:1-2, 15; 3:14-16*) In this letter, Paul implores Timothy not to be ashamed of the gospel; why? Because the word of God is valuable and sacred. In 2:1-2, Timothy is instructed to entrust to other faithful men what he (Timothy) has heard from Paul. Again, he is to be strengthened by God in this work. It is such a valuable work that God himself will strengthen Timothy for it, just as He strengthens Timothy to suffer on behalf of the gospel. What is then the result of Timothy’s entrusting work? It is that these faithful men will then be able to teach others what was entrusted to them. Moving to 2:15, the word of God is worthy of being handled rightly. As noted above, why is it worth handling rightly? Because it has the power to transform lives, and as such, it is a very valuable thing. This very idea is stated clearly in 3:15, “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.” The sacred writings (the word of God) make salvation through Jesus clearly known. There is a balance that must be struck here; the Scriptures make Jesus plainly known, but simply reading them are not enough for salvation. Faith must also be in operation, and faith is to be centered entirely in Christ. This was evident in the case of the unbelieving Jews.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> *Its value and sacred nature are directly tied to the One who inspired it, God.*

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 181.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

**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.”

## 1. Paul and Timothy

- a. Why are we doing this series? → So that we can gain both a clear understanding of what is essential to the Christian faith, and that we can interact with greater charity with other believers.
  - i. **What is theological charity?**
    1. The knowledge to understand what is and isn't an essential, and the humility to listen and disagree with respect.
- b. What is an essential? → According to Webster's Dictionary - **absolutely necessary; extremely important: / fundamental or central to the nature of something or someone**
  - i. When we talk about essentials, we are talking about the very things that are core and required for the essence of something to be preserved.
  - ii. When we talk about essentials in theology and doctrine, we are talking about the things that are core to the character and nature of God and to right belief about the things of God.
    1. **That is, fundamental beliefs that hold to what is revealed about God in the Scriptures and thus do not confuse or conflate him with any other god.**
- c. Context of the Letters to Timothy (1&2 Timothy)
  - i. **Timothy was a young pastor in Ephesus.**
  - ii. **Paul was Tim's spiritual father.**
  - iii. **Paul wrote this letter while he was under house arrest in Rome.**
  - iv. First Timothy, Second Timothy and Titus, termed the Pastoral Epistles since the eighteenth century, are, with Philemon, letters of the Pauline corpus addressed to individuals. Like other NT literature written under Paul's name, they employ the letter form to convey not just personal communications but primarily teachings and exhortations, some of them preformed traditions already in use in Pauline congregations. In the face of defections and of the depredations of false teachers they emphasize instructions on ministry, church order and related themes in order to protect the apostle's congregations in Asia Minor and Greece during the final years of his life.<sup>3</sup>
  - v. Paul took his last missionary journey from the Aegean to Rome, where he was again imprisoned, wrote 2 Timothy and soon thereafter was beheaded on the Ostian Way (2 Tim 4:6–7; *Acts of Paul* 11; Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 2.25.5–8). He may possibly have been arrested in Ephesus (Spicq, I.141) or Troas (Fee, 244–45) and taken to Rome a prisoner. More likely, in accordance with second-century traditions used in the *Acts of Paul* (9–10), he returned to Rome a free man (Rordorf, 323; cf. Zahn, II.67) to minister to a

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<sup>3</sup> E. Earle Ellis, “Pastoral Letters,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 658–659.

church that was suffering “repeated calamities and reverses” (1 Clement 1:1) due to the continuing persecution of Nero.<sup>4</sup>

1. Probably Peter suffered death near the beginning of the Neronian pogrom in the winter or spring of 65 and Paul in late 67, or at any rate before the suicide of Nero on June 9, 68 (cf. Zahn, II.61–67; Edmundson, 147–52; otherwise: Harnack, I.240–43). If so, he would have composed 2 Timothy in the late summer or fall of A.D. 67.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. The Bible is the best compass for life.

### a. What does a compass do? → It orients the user.

- i. Remember, the power of a compass is that it can orient you in the right direction and keep you going that way. This is what the Bible does for you and me.

### b. How does the Bible orient us?

#### i. Explains evil and the human condition.

1. The Bible doesn’t pull any punches when it comes to this topic. It starts with the creation not only of man, but of everything, and it was all created good by God. Then, humanity rebelled and brought death and destruction to the good world that God created. From the point of original sin, the Bible unpacks the root of the reality of evil, sin.

#### ii. Offers the most complete picture of redemption and beauty.

1. The Bible doesn’t simply stop by offering a comprehensive view of evil; it goes on to tell about God’s plan and offer of redemption. This plan is made known and real through the sending of God himself in the incarnation. God then makes right our rebellion and makes a covenant with Himself (on our behalf) so that we could experience redemption. This leads us into a new and more beautiful way of living as God’s adopted children. Our sin broke the world and brought disorder; God’s love brings beauty and abundant life.

#### iii. Encourages us with the hopeful and secure reality of eternity.

1. The offer of redemption should be enough, yet the Bible goes on to offer yet more. See, this new life that we are given through Jesus isn’t just a tonic to make this life more livable; it actually brings us into a whole new reality now and into eternity. The truth about eternity to come is that it will be the fulfillment of every good thing we know now in Christ Jesus. Finally, this eternity is completely secured for us by Christ, and because of that, our eternal hope is secure.

### c. The Bible is “breathed out by God.” → 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,

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<sup>4</sup> E. Earle Ellis, “Pastoral Letters,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 662.

<sup>5</sup> E. Earle Ellis, “Pastoral Letters,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 662.

Timothy is being reminded that the basis of its profitableness lies in its inspired character.<sup>6</sup> *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.<sup>7</sup>
  - 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.<sup>8</sup>
- d. 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 legend than Greek speculation seems a reasonable explanation of the scant data available.<sup>32</sup> The interest in the law in this passage would serve to confirm this conclusion.<sup>9</sup>
  - 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*.**

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<sup>7</sup> EFCA. *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd Edition (p. 63). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

<sup>8</sup> EFCA. *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd Edition (p. 66). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

<sup>9</sup> Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 41–42.

- e. **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 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.<sup>10</sup>
- f. **Paul doesn't want Timothy to miss the facts that the Bible is capable of offering transforming guidance.** The challenges that he is facing cannot only be answered by the Bible but also 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.<sup>11</sup>
- g. 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.

### 3. The Bible is the best compass for my life.

- a. **There is a distinct objective in the profitability 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).

<sup>10</sup> EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (p. 78). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

<sup>11</sup> Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 182.

‘The man of God is before all the man of the Bible’ (Spicq). There may be an allusion to 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.<sup>12</sup>

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.**<sup>13</sup>
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.

**b. Learning and Growth go together.**

- i. You cannot have growth without learning, but just because you learn something it doesn’t always mean that you are growing.
- ii. **Learning doesn’t always lead to growth.**
  1. e.g. Food... Budgets... Exercise
    - a. Just think about these three areas. In each one, we all have knowledge that we don’t actually put into practice.
    - b. I’ve learned about healthy diets, wise financial practices, and good habits of exercise, but I still struggle to put them into practice.
    - c. In other words, it is entirely possible to learn about something without it transforming or changing you.
- iii. **Growth comes from learning.**
  1. Growth is evidenced by the formation of character and skills.
  2. This formation is the deeper and more important reality that we think about when we think about learning. Growth is actually the goal of the Christian life, not just learning.

**c. Relationships of love and accountability – Key to real growth.**

- i. **From our survey in January** → Those who can describe specific next steps they are taking to grow in self-awareness and emotional health are more likely to be in a two-way accountability relationship (58% vs. 30% among those unable to articulate next steps).

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<sup>12</sup> Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 182–183.

<sup>13</sup> 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.

1. When we took the “My Life-defining” survey in January, one of the most interesting insights about consistent spiritual growth was not about Bible study, but about relationships of love and accountability.
  2. In circles like ours, we think that more and better Bible study is merely a matter of time, study techniques, and determination. However, what the study revealed is that while Bible study is really important, what makes it truly transformative is when it is done in community with those who want to help you grow.
  3. In fact, if you have a person to whom you can be vulnerable and accountable, you are 28% more likely to be able to name specific next steps and ways that you are growing!
- ii. **Do I have someone in my life who challenges and sharpens me?**
1. This is the question that is really asking about having someone in your life who isn’t impressed with you, but also equally loves you and believes in you. This kind of relationship is crucial to our growth.
- iii. **Who is my tough stuff person?**
1. The way that we ask this here at Christ Community is, “Who shares my tough stuff?” This is the question of authentic and honest relationships where we bear each other’s burdens and respond with loving candor so that we can grow.
  2. Here is what is really interesting from our “Life-defined” survey an important pattern in the responses emerged. Those who had a “tough stuff” friend were significantly more likely to be growing spiritually and able to articulate their growth steps. → 28% more likely to be growing spiritually.
  3. We all need a “tough stuff” friend or friends. The caution here is that we can’t have this kind of relationship with 10 or 15, but we can with 3 or 4.