

We Believe – Week #2

The Bible: Our Ultimate Authority (2 Tim. 3:14-16)

INTRODUCTION: This summer, we are working our way through the EFCA’s Statement of Faith as we look at truths and theological realities that the Church has held to over the last 2,000 years. Last week, as we started our series, we learned that not every theological idea is an essential. Essentials are those theological truths that are core to the nature of both God and Christianity. Often, theologians talk about these as being required beliefs for salvation. And that is often a helpful starting place when we are discerning whether something is an essential or not. We can think of Doctrinal Rank this way: Essentials, Convictions, Commitments, and Preferences. We need to remember that just because something isn’t an essential, that doesn’t mean that it isn’t important. It can be very important! But we have to have the knowledge and humility to acknowledge that it isn’t an essential. When we operate with theological charity, we can walk forward in unity and keep the bond of peace.

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, 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: *II 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.¹ 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.² *Its value and sacred nature are directly tied to the One who inspired it, God.*

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

² *Ibid.*, 182.

GETTING STARTED – As you begin your group time, share about your journey with the Bible. Who taught it to you for the first time? Were you skeptical of it, or perhaps you still are a little skeptical? What has been helpful in your understanding of the Bible? What is your relationship with it like now?

IN THE WORD – Let's dig back into the passage. It is important to strengthen our muscles in reading God's Word. On Sunday, we walked through the passage in the sermon. Hopefully, that helped you to see the landmarks of the passage with fresh eyes. Now, with your group, go back through it and see what God is saying to you specifically.

First, before you read the passage, take a moment to ask God's Spirit to quiet your mind and heart and to illuminate the text to you. Second, read the passage aloud to the group. Then, follow the simple method below. (O.P.A)

Observe: Make 8-10 observations from the passage. Pay close attention to observe and note repeated words and phrases, names, places, and themes.

Principles: From your list of observations, what patterns or big ideas do you see emerging? Can you distill it down into 2-4 big idea truths?

Apply: Moving from your list of principles, it is time to apply God's Word. Remember, we believe that God's Word is living and active and that it can change the way we live Monday- Friday. What is one tangible way to apply a truth from your list above?

Note: Another way to approach your time together is to talk through the following questions about the article of faith we are studying that week.

1. We can look to passages in the Bible that talk about its goodness, value, and authority. But the real testimony is not what the Bible says about itself; it is our personal testimony that is most powerful. How has the Bible made a real difference in your life?
2. What is core to this article of faith? That is, what is something that, if you took it away or changed it, it would significantly alter the article of faith about God?
3. What is clarified for you in this article of faith about the person, nature, and character of God?
4. What is confusing for you in this article of faith? Take time as a group to chat through and offer perspectives on the things that are confusing. The beauty of a group is that often, when we study together, we help sharpen and clarify what is confusing for one another.
5. How does this article on God apply to my everyday life? That is, how does it change my outlook and approach to my Monday-Saturday life?