

Sermon Notes The Scriptures

Material for this message was drawn from a series of sermons by Dr. Calvin Wittman (2009)

Focal Scripture Reference: 2 Timothy 3:16

One of the things too many Christians are lacking today is a firm grasp of doctrinal truths. Doctrine, simply put, is nothing more than a systematic way of understanding scripture. Doctrinal studies give us a panoramic view of scripture, allowing us to gain a comprehensive understanding of scriptural teaching on any given subject.

We will begin where all good theological studies should begin: with scripture itself. Let's begin by examining the nature of scripture, then we'll look at the witnesses to scripture and finally we will look at the purpose of scripture.

1. The nature of Scripture: The Word of God

As Southern Baptists, the statement of our faith, the Baptist Faith and Message, says this about God's Word:

"The Holy bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the truth center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds and religious opinions should be tried. All scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation." (The Baptist Faith and Message 2000)

As we seek to understand the nature of the scripture, there are three terms we should understand. The first term is, "revelation."

A. The Bible is Divine Revelation

Revelation is the direct divine influence which communicates truth from God to man. There are two types of revelation: General revelation and special revelation. General revelation occurs as God reveals His nature and purpose through creation and through history.

Romans 1:20 reminds us, "**For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.**"

But general revelation, by itself, is insufficient to teach us all God wanted us to know about Himself and His plan for humanity. That is why He gave us scripture through special revelation. It is the only source available to us of certain knowledge about God. Without scripture, each of us would be left on our own to figure out Who God is, what He is like and how we can relate to Him.

Because we have Scripture, we are not left to wonder. We don't have to grope in spiritual darkness trying to imagine who God is and what He is like. Scripture tells us all these things. Through the Bible, God clearly reveals Himself to us.

The second term we need to understand in "Inspiration."

B. The Bible is Divinely Inspired

When the bible says that all scripture is inspired by God, it is speaking about a special kind of inspiration. In **2 Timothy 3:16** the Bible says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness ..."

The doctrine of Divine inspiration simply tells us that scripture is an accurate transference of truth from God to man in language which we can understand. Like a musician blowing air through a musical instrument to create a specific note, God's Spirit "blew through" the instrumentation of divinely inspired men to produce a certain and perfect word. Therefore, every word of the Bible is fully inspired and is exactly what God intended it to be.

There is a wonderful verse in **Deuteronomy 29:29**, which says, "**The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.**"

The divine inspiration of scripture assures us that it is exactly what God wanted us to know, nothing more and nothing less. This gives us a confidence and a certainty that we can rely upon. The third term we need understand is the word "Canon."

C. The Bible is a Completed Canon

You may have heard people speak of the Canon of scripture. What they are talking about is the completed record of God's word. A canon is a list or a catalog of books. One Biblical scholar describes the Biblical canon as, "The collection or list of books that are recognized as genuine, inspired Holy Scripture." (Swindoll, 1995)

Jude 3 says, "**I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.**"

Once for all means just that. God gave it and we are not to add to it. It is complete.

Through His providence and sovereign direction, God has preserved His inerrant and infallible word for us. The Bible we have is the complete canon or catalogue of books God wants us to have. Next, let's consider the witnesses we have to the authenticity of scripture.

2. Witnesses to Scripture

A. Historical witness

The first witness is the historical witness to scripture. History itself has proven that God's word is true and can be trusted. Many archaeological discoveries have refuted skepticism concerning the historical accuracy of the Bible. And, while we do not have the time to list them all, know that they are numerous and all of them speak to the accuracy and veracity of scripture.

It is also worth mentioning that no archaeological discovery, properly investigated and understood, has ever refuted the words of scripture but has only served to support scriptural claims. Archeological history speaks loudly to the trustworthy nature of Scripture. The second witness is scripture itself.

B. Scriptural Witness

Scripture clearly claims to be the timeless word of God and to be true without any mixture of fault or error.

a. In the Old Testament

Psalm 19:7-9 says, **"⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. ⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. ⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous."**

The prophet Isaiah says this in **Isaiah 40:8**, **"The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."**

b. In the New Testament

2 Timothy 2:16, **"All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correction, for training in righteousness;"**

And Jesus Himself said in **Matthew 24:35**, **"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."**

The Bible is not unclear. It does not leave us wondering about what it claims to be.

It clearly claims to be God's inerrant and infallible word and it clearly claims to have God as its Author.

The third witness is human experience.

C. Human Experience

While all human experience must be measured by biblical truth, we have but to look behind us, around us and within us to see that God's word is true and can be trusted. What have some of the great men of our country said of the Bible?

George Washington, the first president of the United States said, "It is impossible to govern the world without God and the Bible. Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that our national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

Abraham Lincoln said of the Bible, "In regard to this great book, I have but to say, it is the best gift God has given to man. All things most desirable for man's welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it."

Clearly, men who have been challenged with the task of leading our great nation have understood and believed the Bible to be the Word of God and to be true. Your own experience, if you are a Christian, should also confirm to you that scripture is trustworthy. Were it not for scripture, you would not know of Jesus and if you did not know of Jesus, you would be hopelessly lost in your sin.

If I were to call upon each of you to stand and give witness to the scripture, to its reliability, to its impact on your life and to the way God has used it to bring you to Himself and make you who you are, we would surely be here all day, for each of you who have been born again would give witness to the power of God's word.

We can attest to the fact that the Bible contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. So, we have studied the nature of scripture, that it is God's inspired revelation of Himself to humanity. We have heard from witnesses to scripture, who have spoken to its power and its impact.

The final thing we will consider this is the purpose of scripture.

3. Purpose of Scripture: Revelation Toward Application

The Bible has been and it remains the bestselling book in America. Yet it also remains one of the least read books in America. Some polls estimate that as few as ten percent of Americans read their bible every day. With that in mind, we need to be reminded that God did not give us His word to fill our heads; He gave us His word to change our hearts.

Having said that, we must also understand that God gave us the Bible so that we can apply it and practice its teachings in our daily lives. Consider three things then, which will help as we seek to apply the Scripture to our everyday lives.

A. Know It

God expects for us, as His children, to know His word. You see, the person who will not read his or her Bible is no better off than a person who has no Bible to read. How can a man claim to be born again, to be filled with the Spirit of God who inspired the very words of scripture and have no appetite for the word of God? How can a woman claim to have Jesus on the throne of her heart and have no desire to receive instruction from the One she claims is her Master?

It doesn't add up. If you have no desire for the word of God, you need to take a long hard look to see if you are indeed a child of God. If we are truly in love with God, if we have really been born again, then we will agree with the Psalmist who says in **Psalm 119**:

¹¹ I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. ⁴⁷ for I delight in your commands because I love them. ⁷² The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold. ⁹⁷ Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. ¹⁴⁰ Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them.

(Psalm 119:11, 47, 72, 97, & 140)

We need to know the scripture. But secondly, we need to understand it.

B. Understand It

Many people read the scripture like literature but fail to understand the spiritual significance of what they read. But this should not be the case for Christians.

1 Corinthians 2:14-16 says this, **¹⁴ The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: ¹⁶ "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.**

So, as Christians who have the Holy Spirit, we should be able to see clearly into the spiritual truths of scripture. But you see there is an issue with this process.

Our ability understand scripture clearly and correctly is dependent upon the degree to which our hearts and lives are surrendered to the influence and control of the Spirit of God. The more control He has, the more illumination or insight we have.

The less control He has of our hearts and lives, the more opaque and obscure the scriptures will become.

I believe one of the reasons many Christians have difficulty understanding scripture is because they need to get things right with God in their lives. To clearly and correctly understand the Bible you must be right with God.

Not only are we to know it and understand it. The ultimate goal of scripture is for us to put it into practice.

C. Practice It

Somewhere along the way, many people get the idea that all they have to do with the Bible is study it and understand it. But the purpose of scripture is action oriented. It was given so that we can do it.

James 1:22 says, "**Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.**"

Often our problem is not that we don't understand what the Bible says; **our problem is that we don't want to do what we understand.**

Jesus puts it about as plainly as it can be stated in **Matthew 7:24-27.**

²⁴ "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

Conclusion

We have been reminded that the Bible is God's Word meant for us so that we could know Him. Let us believe what it says and put it into practice in our daily lives.