

BIBLE

The Bible: What is Its Purpose?

February 18, 2018 - 2 Timothy 3:15-17

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 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. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God[b] may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Secondly, Paul explains the purpose of Scripture: it is 'profitable'. And this is precisely because it is inspired by God. Only its divine origin secures and explains its human profit. In order to show what this is, Paul uses two expressions. The first is in verse 15: 'The sacred writings', he says, 'are able to instruct you for salvation.' The Bible is essentially a handbook of salvation. Its over-arching purpose is to teach not facts of science (*e.g.* the nature of moon rock) which men can discover by their own empirical investigation, but facts of salvation, which no space exploration can discover but only God can reveal. The whole Bible unfolds the divine scheme of salvation—man's creation in God's image, his fall through disobedience into sin and under judgment, God's continuing love for him in spite of his rebellion, God's eternal plan to save him through his covenant of grace with a chosen people, culminating in Christ; the coming of Christ as the Saviour, who died to bear man's sin, was raised from death, was exalted to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit; and man's rescue first from guilt and alienation, then from bondage, and finally from mortality in his progressive experience of the liberty of God's children. None of this would be known apart from the biblical revelation. 'Scripture contains the perfect rule of a good and happy life.'

More particularly, the Bible instructs for salvation 'through faith in Christ Jesus'. So, since the Bible is a book of salvation, and since salvation is through Christ, the Bible focuses its attention upon Christ. The Old Testament foretells and foreshadows him in many and various ways; the Gospels tell the story of his birth and life, his words and works, his death and resurrection; the Acts describe what he continued to do and teach through his chosen apostles, especially in spreading the gospel and establishing the church from Jerusalem to Rome; the Epistles display the full glory of his person and work, and apply it to the life of the Christian and the church; while the Revelation depicts Christ sharing the throne of God now and coming soon to consummate his salvation and judgment. This comprehensive

portraiture of Jesus Christ is intended to elicit our 'faith' in him, in order that by faith we may be saved.

Paul now goes on to show that the profit of Scripture relates to both creed and conduct (16b, 17). The false teachers divorced them; we must marry them. The neb expresses the matter clearly. As for our creed, Scripture is profitable 'for teaching the truth and refuting error'. As for our conduct, it is profitable 'for reformation of manners and discipline in right living'. In each pair the negative and positive counterparts are combined. Do we hope, either in our own lives or in our teaching ministry, to overcome error and grow in truth, to overcome evil and grow in holiness? Then it is to Scripture that we must primarily turn, for Scripture is 'profitable' for these things.

Indeed, Scripture is the chief means which God employs to bring 'the man of God' to maturity. Who is intended by this expression is not explained. It may be a general term for every Christian, since the words themselves mean no more than 'the man who belongs to God' (neb). On the other hand, it was an Old Testament title of respect applied to some of God's spokesmen like Moses (Dt. 33:1), David (2 Ch. 8:14) and Elijah (1 Ki. 17:18), and Paul specifically addressed Timothy by this phrase in his first letter (6:11). It may therefore refer here to men called to positions of responsibility in the church, and especially to ministers whose task it is, under the authority of Scripture, to teach and refute, to reform and discipline. At all events, it is only by a diligent study of Scripture that the man of God may become 'complete, equipped for every good work'.

Looking back over this chapter as a whole, we can appreciate the relevance of its message to our pluralist and permissive society. The 'times of stress' in which we seem to be living are very distressing. Sometimes one wonders if the world and the church have gone mad, so strange are their views, and so lax their standards. Some Christians are swept from their moorings by the floodtide of sin and error. Others go into hiding, as offering the best hope of survival, the only alternative to surrender. But neither of these is the Christian way. 'But as for you,' Paul says to us as he did to Timothy, 'stand firm. Never mind if the pressure to conform is very strong. Never mind if you are young, inexperienced, timid and weak. Never mind if you find yourself alone in your witness. You have followed my teaching so far. Now continue in what you have come to believe. You know the biblical credentials of your faith. Scripture is God-breathed and profitable. Even in the midst of these grievous times in which evil men and impostors go on from bad to worse, it can make you complete and it can equip you for your work. Let the word of God make you a man of God! Remain loyal to it and it will lead you on into Christian maturity.'¹

¹ Stott, J. R. W. (1973). *Guard the Gospel the message of 2 Timothy* (pp. 102–104). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Teaching

We have already said quite a lot about the Bible's teaching. But Paul is now saying that Timothy should make good use of it as an indispensable instrument for teaching purposes. If I want to learn all about the history of our nation, I will read the history books, and if possible listen to those teachers who have access to the original sources and documents. Similarly, if I want to become more knowledgeable about the great doctrines of the Christian faith, I will set myself the task of studying the original sources in the Bible, for it imparts the knowledge of God's ultimate revelation in Jesus Christ.

When people are in earnest in their pursuit of the truth of God's Word, they are not dependent on their own intellectual capacity alone, but are helped by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Christ said, 'When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth' (John 16:13). Therefore, when we read and study the Bible's teaching, the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds and understanding, and directs its truth to our hearts. In this way, we are able to discern between truth and falsehood, and will not fall for everything we hear or read because it comes from a bishop, theologian or pastor.

Rebuking

The Bible not only teaches the truth of God, but it also teaches the truth about ourselves, and gives many warnings and rebukes about our conduct and discipleship. It is a very honest book, and it never whitewashes any of God's servants who appear in its pages. Their faults and failings are all clearly set forth so that we may learn from them.

As for ourselves, when we read the Bible we are made to take the blinkers off and see ourselves as we really are in the sight of God—and that can be a painful experience. We constantly fall into sin and give way to temptation, and when we come to the Word of God it rebukes us. We may succeed in keeping our conscience quiet for a time, as long as we keep clear of the Bible. But the moment we start reading it, there will be verses and passages that make us feel extremely uncomfortable because they bring home to us that we have grieved God's Spirit. And until we take the rebuke to heart—in repentance and confession—we will never know inner peace, or make further progress in our discipleship.

In his capacity as a pastor and Christian leader, Timothy is to make good use of the Bible as a teaching tool to rebuke others when they fall into doctrinal error concerning doctrine, or, by their conduct, bring the church of God into disrepute. Later, when giving a charge to Timothy to preach the gospel, Paul tells him plainly that he is to rebuke his people when they fall into sin (2 Tim. 4:2). But whenever the Bible has to be used in this way, that is, to warn and reprove a fellow Christian, it should be done in a spirit of love.

Correcting and training in righteousness

It is not enough that we should be rebuked by the Word of God when we go astray and fall into sin; we also need to be corrected as to how we should live in order to please God. And this, too, the Bible is able to do. It corrects our wrong thinking, and trains or instructs us in

the way of righteousness, the right path we are to follow if we want to grow in godliness and holiness of life. As the psalmist says, 'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path' (Ps. 119:105).

This illumination upon our path through life comes from the many directives we have in the Scriptures concerning different aspects of life—our use of time, family life, the use of money, the rearing of children, marriage, sexual relations, etc. In all these things, broad principles and guidelines are laid down which help to train us in the life of righteousness. It is like listening to a form of preaching. To quote J I Packer, 'Holy Scripture should be thought of as God preaching—God preaching to me every time I read or hear any part of it—God the Father preaching God the Son in the power of God the Holy Spirit'.

Equipped for work

Paul concludes this section by stating the purpose underlying our desire to read and study the Scriptures. '... So that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Tim. 3:17). The expression 'man of God' would refer in the first instance to Timothy and other pastors, who need to be equipped with the authority of Scripture to teach and lead God's people. But it can equally apply to all Christians. For we all need to reach maturity in Christ, and it is only by our diligent study of the Bible that we can become thoroughly equipped in knowledge, faith and holiness to do God's work.²

3:14–15. Again the strong direct address, **But as for you....** begins this section (cf. 2:1; 3:10; 4:5). The exhortation is to **continue in** the things Timothy had **learned** and **become convinced of** (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1–2). These things had come from two sources, which Paul set side by side as of equal importance: his own testimony, and **the Holy Scriptures**, which at that time of course consisted of the Old Testament. Timothy's complete confidence in both sources would be enough to prevent any slippage in his commitment to the truth. Again these verses seem to imply that Timothy's salvation occurred prior to his acquaintance with Paul (cf. 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2, 5; Acts 16:1). The Scriptures bring **salvation** only when one places his **faith in Christ Jesus**.

3:16–17. Paul had just noted that the Scriptures are able to make one wise with regard to salvation, a lesson Timothy had learned long before. But now Paul wanted to reemphasize to Timothy the crucial role of God's inscripturated revelation in his present ministry. Thus Paul reminded Timothy that **all Scripture is God-breathed** (*theopneustos*, "inspired"), that is, God's words were given through men superintended by the Holy Spirit so that their writings are without error. This fact was virtually taken for granted by the Jews. Then Paul asserted the "usefulness" of the Word. For each aspect of Timothy's

² Williams, P. (2007). *Opening up 2 Timothy* (pp. 84–87). Leominster: Day One Publications.

ministry, whatever it might be—**teaching** (instructing believers in God’s truths), **rebuking** those in sin (cf. 1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:2), **correcting** those in error (cf. 2 Tim. 2:25; 4:2), **and training** (*paideian*, lit., “child-training”) **in righteousness** (guiding new believers in God’s ways)—for all of these and more the written Word of God is profitable. With it **the man of God** (one who must provide spiritual leadership to others) is *artios*—“complete, capable, proficient in the sense of being able to meet all demands.” To drive home his point still more emphatically Paul added **equipped** (*exērtismenos*, “furnished”) **for every good work** (cf. 2:21). Paul placed heavy burdens of ministry on his young disciple in this letter, but he did not do so irresponsibly. He was confident of Timothy’s commitment to and dependence on the Scriptures, and he was even more confident of God’s ability to supply all Timothy’s needs through the Word.³

Which are able to make thee wise unto salvation. It is a very high commendation of the Holy Scriptures, that we must not seek anywhere else the wisdom which is sufficient for salvation; as the next verse also expresses more fully. But he states, at the same time, what we ought to seek in the Scripture; for the false prophets also make use of it as a pretext; and therefore, in order that it may be useful to us for salvation, it is necessary to understand the right use of it.

Through faith, which is in Christ Jesus. What if any one give his whole attention to curious questions? What if he adhere to the mere letter of the law, and do not seek Christ? What if he pervert the natural meaning by inventions that are foreign to it? For this reason he directs us to the faith of Christ as the design, and therefore as the sum, of the Scriptures; for on faith depends also what immediately follows.

16. *All Scripture; or, the whole of Scripture;* though it makes little difference as to the meaning. He follows out that commendation which he had glanced at briefly. First, he commends the Scripture on account of its authority; and secondly, on account of the utility which springs from it. In order to uphold the authority of the Scripture, he declares that it is *divinely inspired*; for, if it be so, it is beyond all controversy that men ought to receive it with reverence. This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him, first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the Law and the

³ Litfin, A. D. (1985). 2 Timothy. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 757). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit.

If it be objected, “How can this be known?” I answer, both to disciples and to teachers, God is made known to be the author of it by the revelation of the same Spirit. Moses and the prophets did not utter at random what we have received from their hand, but, speaking at the suggestion of God, they boldly and fearlessly testified, what was actually true, that it was the mouth of the Lord that spake. The same Spirit, therefore, who made Moses and the prophets certain of their calling, now also testifies to our hearts, that he has employed them as his servants to instruct us. Accordingly, we need not wonder if there are many who doubt as to the Author of the Scripture; for, although the majesty of God is displayed in it, yet none but those who have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit have eyes to perceive what ought, indeed, to have been visible to all, and yet is visible to the elect alone. This is the first clause, that we owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God; because it has proceeded from him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it.

And is profitable. Now follows the second part of the commendation, that the Scripture contains a perfect rule of a good and happy life. When he says this, he means that it is corrupted by sinful abuse, when this usefulness is not sought. And thus he indirectly censures those unprincipled men who fed the people with vain speculations, as with wind. For this reason we may, in the present day, condemn all who, disregarding edification, agitate questions which, though they are ingenious, are also useless. Whenever ingenious trifles of that kind are brought forward, they must be warded off by this shield, that “Scripture is profitable.” Hence it follows, that it is unlawful to treat it in an unprofitable manner; for the Lord, when he gave us the Scriptures, did not intend either to gratify our curiosity, or to encourage ostentation, or to give occasion for chatting and talking, but to do us good; and, therefore, the right use of Scripture must always tend to what is profitable.

For instruction. Here he enters into a detailed statement of the various and manifold advantages derived from the Scriptures. And, first of all, he mentions *instruction*, which ranks above all the rest; for it will be to no purpose that you exhort or reprove, if you have not previously instructed. But because “instruction,” taken by itself, is often of little avail, he adds *reproof* and *correction*.

It would be too long to explain what we are to learn from the Scriptures; and, in the preceding verse, he has given a brief summary of them under the word *faith*. The most valuable knowledge, therefore, is “faith in Christ.” Next follows instruction for regulating the life, to which are added the excitements of exhortations and reproofs. Thus he who knows how to use the Scriptures properly, is in want of nothing for salvation, or for a holy life. *Reproof* and *correction* differ little from each other, except that the latter proceeds from the former; for the beginning of repentance is the knowledge of our sinfulness, and a conviction of the judgment of God. *Instruction in righteousness* means the rule of a good and holy life.

17. *That the man of God may be perfect. Perfect* means here a blameless person, one in whom there is nothing defective; for he asserts absolutely, that the Scripture is sufficient for perfection. Accordingly, he who is not satisfied with Scripture desires to be wiser than is either proper or desirable.

But here an objection arises. Seeing that Paul speaks of the Scriptures, which is the name given to the Old Testament, how does he say that it makes a man thoroughly perfect? for, if it be so, what was afterwards added by the apostles may be thought superfluous. I reply, so far as relates to the substance, nothing has been added; for the writings of the apostles contain nothing else than a simple and natural explanation of the Law and the Prophets, together with a manifestation of the things expressed in them. This eulogium, therefore, is not inappropriately bestowed on the Scriptures by Paul; and, seeing that its instruction is now rendered more full and clear by the addition of the Gospel, what can be said but that we ought assuredly to hope that the usefulness, of which Paul speaks, will be much more displayed, if we are willing to make trial and receive it?⁴

(3:16, 17) After exhorting Timothy to hold fast to the sacred scriptures he was taught, and those were the Old Testament scriptures, Paul now proceeds to describe them. "All" is pas (π α ς), which when used with a singular substantive without the article, means "every," not "all." "Scripture" here is graphē (γ ρ α φ η), "a writing, thing written," used of the writings of the o.t. prophets (Matt. 26:56), and of the o.t. scriptures in general (Matt. 26:54). The expression pasa graphē (π α σ α γ ρ α φ η) ("every scripture") speaks, not of the o.t. scriptures as a whole, but of each separate passage considered as a unit. The first thing Paul says about the o.t. scriptures which Timothy was taught, is that every part of them is inspired of God. The verb of being is often left out, as it is here, and the reader or translator must supply it. "Inspired of God" is theopneustos (θ ε ο π ν ε υ σ τ ο ς), made up of theos (θ ε ο ς), "God," and pneustos (π ν ε υ σ τ ο ς), from pnein (π ν ε ι ν), "to breathe." The compound word means "God-breathed." The statement therefore is, "Every scripture is God-breathed." The context in which Paul is writing is limited to the o.t. scriptures. One could translate, "Every scripture is God-breathed." The context limits these writings to the o.t. writings. Thus, does Paul declare the divine inspiration of the o.t. The n.t. had not yet been completed, and Paul does not refer here to its divine inspiration. His classic passage on this subject is I Cor. 2:9-16 which includes the inspiration of the n.t. "Doctrine" is didaskalia (δ ι δ α σ κ α λ ι α), "teaching," that is, "teaching material." "Reproof" is elegmos (ε λ ε γ μ ο ς), "conviction." The verbal form elegchō (ε λ ε γ χ ω) means "to rebuke another with such effectual wielding of the victorious arms of the truth, as to bring him, if not always to a confession, yet at least to a conviction of his sin" (Trench). "Correction" is

⁴ Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (pp. 248-251). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

epanorthōsis (ἐπανορθωσις), “restoration to an upright or right state, correction or improvement” of life or character. Vincent translates, “setting right.” “Instruction” is paideia (παιδεία), “the whole training and education of children which relates to the cultivation of mind and morals, and employs for this purpose, now commands and admonitions, now reproof and punishment; whatever in adults also cultivates the soul, especially by correcting mistakes and curbing passions, hence, instruction which aims at the increase of virtue; in biblical usage, chastisement, chastening” (Thayer). In the LXX, the word means primarily either “correction” or “discipline.” It is used in the n.t. especially of God’s chastisement by means of sorrow and evil. We must be careful to note that the word does not have a punitive connotation. “Perfect” is artios (ἀρτιος), “complete, fitted,” having reference to special aptitude for given uses. It speaks of “a mutual, symmetrical adjustment of all that goes to make a man: a harmonious combination of different qualities and powers” (Vincent). “Thoroughly furnished” is exartizō (ἐξαρτιζω), “to complete, finish.” It has the same root as artios (ἀρτιος), the word for “perfect.” The prefixed preposition ex (ἐξ) means “out,” and makes the compound verb mean, “fitted out.”

Translation. Every scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for training with respect to righteousness, in order that the man of God may be complete, fitted out for every good work.⁵

⁵ Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (2 Ti 3:14–16). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.