

Faithful Preaching: Making Known the Whole Counsel of God

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

2 Timothy 3:14 - 17 (ESV)

The final charge of Apostle Paul to Timothy is to preach the word (2 Tim.4:1-2). We have to ask ourselves, why is Paul so concerned to charge Timothy to preach the word? Why would that be so important to him? The pericope we are considering in this article gives us the answer to that question. Why is it so important for Timothy to preach the word as opposed to preaching something else? It is because of what Paul says that the word is and does in verses 14 to 17 of chapter 3. This is the framework of what we are going to consider in this article, as we look especially at verses 16 and 17 as supplying the answer to the question on why is Paul giving this charge to preach the word. According to Paul, the word is God-breathed and profitable. Therefore, when the people of God hear the word of God preached, it is God that they hear. We come to church to engage and encounter the living God by hearing him speak to us. How do we hear God? Only if the preacher preaches the word; if he preaches something else, we do not get God. To have God in our worship, we have to hear His word. For the only way to worship a spirit is to obey the spirit's word. For without the spirit's self-disclosure, there is no means to know who he is or how to worship him.

Calling attention to this crucial role of the word of God, J.I. Packer defines preaching by describing what a sermon is. He says, “A sermon is an applicatory declaration, spoken in God's name and for his praise, in which some part of the written word of God delivers through the preacher some part of its message about God and godliness in relation to those whom the preacher addresses.”¹ A sermon is an applicatory declaration, so it is not a lecture on a particular topic. It has exhortation and application in it. Also, it is a declaration in which the word of God delivers through the preacher. Notice it does not say, the preacher delivers the word of God; rather, the word of God delivers through the preacher. In other words, the preacher is just a tool. All that preachers are supposed to do is to facilitate a word mediated encounter between the living God and the congregation. We are merely the vessels through which a message from God to his people is delivered. Thus, it is important that we preach the word because if we do not preach the word we are not facilitating that word mediated encounter between the living God and the people. We would rather be getting in the way of that encounter. Our job is to deliver God's word and get out of the way, so that his people commune with him by the word. We are not mediators, but we are instruments, tools and facilitators. We are the tools of the word, and the word of God delivers through the preacher a message about God and

¹ J.I. Packer, *Truth & Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL.: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1996), 162.

godliness. First of all, it is the message about God, as the Bible is about God, and then, it is about how you can live in communion with God, and in godliness. And so the word of God delivers through the preacher a message about God and godliness to the gathered congregation.

The second reason why we are to preach the word is because of what the word *does* or what the word is for. In Ephesians 2:8-10, Paul says that we are saved by grace through faith, not of works, in order to do good works, which we were created beforehand in Christ to do so. In Ephesians 4:11, Paul goes on to explain why God has given the church the gift of Pastor-Teachers or Shepherd-Elders. It is to equip us for every good work. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:17 that the word of God equips us for every good work. So, putting the two together, we can say, the word of God has been given to Pastor-Teachers and Shepherd-Elders to equip the people of God for every good work, for which they have been created in Christ Jesus, and for which they have been saved by grace through faith alone. The word of God instructs them and equips them for every good work. Hence what the word is and what the word does, explains why Paul charged Timothy to preach the word.

Let us turn our attention now to 2 Timothy 3:16-17 to understand faithful preaching. In this passage, the Apostle Paul is exhorting us, as he exhorts Timothy, to live by the book. For this book comes from the mouth of God; it is the most practical book in the world; and it alone tells one how to live with God. In other words, we are to continue and persist in the truth that we have learned from the Scriptures because they are: i) God breathed (v.16a), ii) profitable (v.16b), and iii) they are the sufficient foundation of Christian living (v.17). This will be the outline for this article. The scriptures are God breathed, profitable, and sufficient to equip us for the living of the Christian Life. Therefore, we preach the whole counsel of God because it is God-breathed, profitable, and equips men and women in Christ to live the Christian Life. This is the threefold assertion of the Apostle Paul:

- I. All scripture is breathed out by God; it is one word in the Greek of v.16a. It is quite literally, all scripture is *God-breathed*.
- II. All scripture is breathed out by God *and profitable*. Profitable for four things: for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness (v.16b).
- III. The God-breathed word is profitable to equip you for every good work as verse 17 says, “that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”. So all Scripture is capable for equipping the saints for faith and life.

Preach the Whole Counsel of God: All Scripture is God-breathed

Paul tells us that the Bible is fully, verbally inspired and he does it in three words - all scripture is God-breathed, *πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος*. Paul does not have an original thought here. Every single thing that Paul asserts in this passage comes directly from the mouth of Jesus.

First of all, notice that Paul speaks here of the plenary inspiration of God's word. *All* of it is God-breathed, not some of it, not most of it, but all of it. This passage speaks against any theory of partial inspiration. Many young people, even if they embrace the glorious doctrines of grace in salvation, will not embrace what the Bible teaches about gender, marriage, and sexuality. In fact, they tend to be suspicious of what the Bible teaches about culture and so they will limit the authority of God's word to the sphere of salvation narrowly construed. But, they will not understand properly, the mediatorial reign of Jesus Christ over everything. That Jesus by his word and Spirit rules the world — everything is under his dominion — is something that young people struggle with, for a whole variety of reasons. This calls for pastors to declare the totality of the Bible's authority. All scripture is authoritative, not just some of the things that the Scripture says, but everything that the Scripture says is God-breathed; it is plenary inspiration.

It's also all *scripture* is God-breathed. Interestingly, it's not just the writers that are inspired, though they were (2 Pet.1:21) It is also not just their ideas that are inspired, as this is not dynamic inspiration. It is verbal inspiration - the words are inspired. This book - γραφή - these words are God breathed. He is speaking of a plenary, verbal inspiration in this passage.

Notice also his use of this language *God-breathed*. It is a New Testament hapax legomenon. Paul takes the word for God, *theos*, he adds the word breathed, *pneuo*, and gets the New Testament hapax *theopneustos*. Paul, however, did not innovate this notion about the Scriptures. It comes from Jesus. In Matthew's gospel, we read about Jesus being tempted by Satan in the wilderness to command the stones to become loaves of bread (Matt.4:3). As we consider this temptation, we have to keep in mind what Jesus later in the sermon on the mount would teach his disciples about trusting in the providential care of the Father. One of the things he teaches them would be that if a child asks his father for bread, he would not give him stones. In other words, Jesus wants his disciples to trust in the goodness of the Father in the gifts that they ask him. In light of this teaching, it is interesting that Satan, here in this temptation in the wilderness, tells Jesus to turn stones into bread. Satan is not just trying to get Jesus to do a magic trick with stones. Rather, Satan is trying to get Jesus to doubt his Father's goodness. He is, in effect, telling Jesus to look out for himself, as his Father has only provided stones and no bread. Here, Satan is not just trying to tempt Jesus, he is trying to adopt him. He is in effect saying, "The Father has not been good to you, Jesus, but if you will follow me, it will turn out good for you." The gall of what Satan is doing here! How does Jesus respond to this temptation of Satan? He says, "For it is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt.4:4). As Jesus quoted Moses from Deuteronomy, consider this phrase "every word that comes from mouth of God." It should sound familiar in light of Paul's assertion in 2 Timothy 3:16 that all Scripture is God-breathed. Notice how the words of Jesus and Paul correspond to each other: every/all, word/Scripture, that comes from the mouth of God/God breathed. Hence, we can deduce that Paul did not indulge in any kind of doctrinal innovation as he was only articulating Jesus's doctrine of Scripture.

Since all Scripture is God-breathed, it is inerrant and authoritative as it is breathed out from the mouth of a holy, perfect, sovereign God. The Apostle Paul is articulating what Scripture *is for*: what it *does* in the Christian Life. It is important for pastors to inculcate these truths about Scripture, by teaching these things, and pressing these things upon their people. Do not assume that one's congregation believes these things about the word of God. Persuade them to believe the authority of the word of God, especially the young people in the congregation. They have all manner of questions in their hearts, as people in the culture work to cause them not to believe in the truthfulness and authority of the word of God. Minister by the word of God to them, in preaching it to address those kinds of questions, and build their confidence in the authority of the word of God.

Preach the Supreme Value of Scripture: All Scripture is Profitable

Second, Paul goes onto say that Scripture is profitable. It is useful and beneficial. Notice what Paul says, "all Scripture is God-breathed *and profitable*" (2 Tim.3:16b). Notice he does not just say, "Scripture is relevant." There was a time, especially in the 1970s, when "relevant" was the cool word. Everything needed to be relevant and Paul's assertion here is that the Bible is much more than merely relevant; it is profitable. Many Evangelical preachers today will say that their job in preaching is to make the Bible relevant. But, they are wrong! The Bible is already relevant. Certainly we want to make sure that it is not made irrelevant in the way it is preached. Moreover, to say the Bible is relevant is not an overclaim for the Bible; rather, it is an underclaim for the Bible. Harry Blamires illustrates this point well in drawing an analogy, when he says,

The word ‘relevance’ ought to be examined in this connection, for it can be argued that familiar slogans about Christianity being relevant to this and that underplay rather than overstate the Christian demand. If someone told you that a supply of gasoline was relevant to the smooth running of your car, you would suspect him of making a feeble joke, for of course gasoline is essential to the smooth running (or even the rough running) of your car.²

The Bible is much more than relevant, as it is absolutely useful and necessary. As Jesus put it, a man cannot live without the word of God. We need the word of God as much as or even more than we need food.

So, the Bible is profitable and thus is useful and necessary. Paul explains this usefulness explicitly in 4 words - *teaching*, *reproof*, *correction*, and *training in righteousness*. It is *teaching* and, therefore, instruction. The word “Torah,” often rendered as law, but recall that the first meaning of that word is instruction. It is family instruction, wherein God explains to his people who he is, what he is like, what he has done, who we are, and how we are to live. It is positive instruction for the people of God.

The Bible is also *reproof* or admonition, or words of warning. The good old Puritan word is dehortation. Exhortation is to exhort one to do the right thing; dehortation is to persuade one not to do the wrong thing. The Bible warns us, which is one of the ways the Bible manifests to us that it is the word of the living God. We do not just read the Bible, the Bible reads us. It is a common experience of Christians to read Scripture and to ponder how something written well over two thousand or three thousand years ago could discern and confront the sins they are struggling with in their lives. The only explanation is that the Bible is God-breathed, and not just a human product. It is God's word and God knows his people. God knows the sin in their lives, and God knows how to speak to that sin. All Scripture is also for *correction*, that is, God does not just say that we are wrong, but his word redirects and points us again in the right direction. It rectifies misbelief and misconduct.

The Bible is also for *training in righteousness*. In other words, it is for discipline: for discipling and preparing the believer in godliness. Paul is saying that the Bible is inherently practical and profitable. There was a period of time in the church growth movement, when in the name of reaching out to unbelievers, it was decided that sermons were irrelevant because unbelievers found them boring and impractical. There was then a famous conversation between Dr. R.C. Sproul and one of the leaders of the church growth movement. This leader told Dr. Sproul about their findings from unbelievers and their decision to make the church exciting and relevant by discarding sermons. Dr. Sproul responded by calling it one of the stupidest things he has heard in his life. Dr. Sproul challenged this leader to look to the Scriptures for any encounter with the living God where someone found it as boring and irrelevant. Dr. Sproul further asserted that in the Bible, we find on the contrary that when men and women have an encounter with God, they are struck with abject horror, they dance for joy, or they even die. We look in vain to the Bible for an encounter with God which is banal and trivial. Maybe the reason why people come to our churches and find it boring and relevant is that God is not there. God's Word is never boring and irrelevant unless you want something other than the living God.

Preach the Sufficiency of Scripture: All Scripture is capable for equipping the saints for faith and life

Having seen that the Bible is God-breathed and is profitable, let us consider the question: what is the Bible for? Or, the matter of what Paul says the word *does*. He says, it equips us and

² Harry Blamires, *Where Do We Stand? An Examination of the Christian's Position in the Modern World* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1980), 26-27.

prepares us to live the Christian life, that we might be adequate, or competent, equipped for holiness and godliness to do every good work. In other words, the Bible's God-breathedness and profitability are for our being equipped in life and godliness. Paul's idea again comes directly from Jesus. We have already noted that Pastor-Teachers, or Shepherd-Elders, are to equip us to do good works, but that idea comes from Jesus. In the Great Commission, Jesus not only commands his disciples to make disciples, but also how to accomplish it. Jesus instructed them, first of all, to baptize their disciples, and then to teach them "to observe all that I have commanded you." So, how is disciple-making done? By baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and *teaching* them to observe all that Jesus has commanded. We should take note that Jesus does not tell us to go and make disciples by teaching them a very simple three-point gospel outline. Rather, we are to make disciples by teaching them to observe *everything* Jesus has ever taught. Moreover, disciple-making is not teaching someone to merely ascent to all the doctrinal truths that Jesus taught. Discipleship is teaching someone to *observe* everything that Jesus has commanded. Therefore, to summarize on the methodology of discipleship. First of all, discipleship is done in the context of the church as we have to baptize that disciple in the name of the Triune God. For, a sacrament is an ordinance that happens in the context of the gathered church. In discipleship, we then teach them to observe everything that Jesus commanded.

Notice the apostle Paul's line of thought. All Scripture is given by inspiration or God-breathed, and profitable in order to equip us for every good work. To equip the disciple, the disciple has to know the whole counsel of God and obey it. The minister's job then is not over until men and women have been conformed to the whole counsel of God; to everything that Jesus commanded. That is the goal of scriptural learning and doctrine, and we must not rest in seeing people merely profess Christ, or begin to study their Bibles, or even to embrace sound doctrine. The pastor cannot rest until the right doctrine by the Spirit's power is working out in holy living in all of the congregation. We really do not have a high view of Scripture until we love it, cherish it, learn it, obey it, and live it out. This is what the pastor is aiming for and what faithful preaching also aims to do.