

## **The Bible Tells Me So**

### **II Timothy 3:16-17**

**By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III](#)**

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to II Timothy, chapter three. Last Lord's Day, those of you who are here at the 8:30 service got one point of a three-point sermon, and we're going to continue in that same passage today. We're going to begin in verse 14, though the focus of our study is going to be on verses 16 and 17.

In this glorious section of II Timothy 3, beginning in verse 10 and running to the end of the chapter, the Apostle Paul is exhorting Timothy to follow his example, and he's appreciating Timothy. He's encouraging Timothy in the fact that Timothy has, to a great extent, followed his example. Now, it would be very easy for you to say 'This is a private letter, a matter between a minister and his young understudy who was a son in the Lord. It's very interesting, but it really doesn't say anything directly to me.' But listen to these connections.

Paul tells Timothy that he has done well to follow his example; that is, that Timothy has done well to follow Paul's example. He's encouraging Timothy for having done that, and he's encouraging him to continue to do that. Now, that's not because the Apostle Paul thought he was the final point of reference in the Christian life, because, after all, the Apostle Paul was simply following the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. But Paul is congratulating Timothy, and encouraging Timothy for having followed his example in life and in ministry.

But he's not only said this to Timothy for Timothy's sake; he's saying this to Timothy for the congregation's sake—for the congregation that Timothy pastors, because Paul knows that this letter is going to be read out loud to that congregation, and he not only wants Timothy to continue to follow his example, he wants that local church to follow his example.

So, this is not a passage simply directed at a pastor; it is a passage directed at a local church; and, furthermore, as we're going to see, the Apostle Paul believes that all Scripture—every last Scripture in the word of God, every passage, every book, every sentence, every word of the word of God from Genesis all the way to Revelation, is profitable for all believers. It is given to all Christians for their being built up in faith, for growing in grace, and so the Apostle Paul doesn't just say these things to Timothy for the sake of Timothy, or even for this congregation in

Ephesus; he says it for the benefit of all Christians. He calls Timothy to live by the Book. He's calling you and me to live by the Book, and that's what's before us in this passage today.

Let's look to God in prayer before we read and hear it. Let's pray.

*Lord God, thank You for Your word. We honor Your word as Your own word to Your people. We acknowledge that it comes from Your own lips. We acknowledge that it does not return void, without accomplishing that which You have appointed it to accomplish. And so, O God, this day as we read what Your word says about Your word, grant that we would view Your word like You view the word; that we would believe about the Bible what the Bible teaches us to believe about the Bible. Then, O God, we pray that we would not simply believe these things, but that we would live these things...live these truths, for Christ's sake. Amen.*

Hear God's word.

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts.

In this passage, the Apostle Paul is offering an exhortation and he's making an assertion to Timothy, to the congregation in Ephesus, and to you and me. And it's an exhortation about the word of God itself, and the first thing I want you to see is Paul exhorting us to live by the Book.

Look at verses 14 and 15. Here Paul tells us that we are to continue...that is, that we are to persist and abide in the Scriptures. Paul has been exhorting Timothy in verses 10 to 13 to continue to follow his example: 'Timothy, you're doing well; you're following me in my teaching, in my conduct, in my purpose, in my faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions and sufferings. You're doing that, Timothy; good! Continue to do that.'

But here he specifically turns and says, 'Timothy, follow (persist, continue, abide) in the things that you have learned.' And I want you to notice what Paul emphasizes here: notice how he emphasizes from whom he has learned these things. Paul began this book by saying, 'Timothy, I remember your grandmother, and I know your mother. I know what kind of women they are: they're godly

women; they're women of the Book; they're women of faith. I know that when you were sitting on their knee, when you were leaning against them as a child, they were teaching you the Book, they were teaching you the faith. They were teaching you about the one true God of the word. Now, Timothy, you remember from whom you've learned this. This isn't some latest fad, false prophet who's come along to tell you about the truth; you've heard that truth ever since you were a child, from your mother and your grandmother. Now, you continue in that truth.'

Every Southern boy will understand the power of that appeal! 'Son, your mama taught you that truth. Don't you ever forget it.' I'll never forget a fullback at my high school. As we walked out of the locker room, there were some guys that were shouting some...they were mocking, and shouting some slogans at us, and one of them called us 'mama's boys'. Well, Kemper, who was a stocky 5'10", 225 pound fullback, his dad had died just a couple of years ago, and his mama was all he had. I won't tell you what Kemper Boyd did to those folks who said, "You're a mama's boy." Kemper loved his mama, and what his mama said, that's what Kemper did.

Well, this is the kind of appeal the Apostle Paul is making here: 'Timothy, remember, your mother and your grandmother taught you the truth from the word of God. You remember from whom you heard this truth.' But that's not, you see, Paul's ultimate argument. He says, 'You remember what it was that you became convinced of.'

Look at verse 15: "...the sacred writings"...the holy Scriptures. It's not just from whom you've learned these things, it's what you are to continue in. 'It's what you learned that I want you to continue in, Timothy: "...the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.'"

You see, that's where Paul is headed. Paul is calling on Timothy to live by the Book:

Continue in the Book, Timothy, because that Book gives you the wisdom that leads to salvation. That book tells you the way of salvation. It tells you the plan of salvation. It tells you the plan of God to redeem sinners into His family; to change them, to transform them, to enable them to walk in this world as His people, as an outpost of glory; and one day to enter into the new heavens and the new earth and dwell with Him forever. That's what this Book tells you. It's like no other book in the world. It's the one Book that teaches the way of salvation. You continue in that Book.

And notice how Paul says it gives you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul knows that it's not enough to say, "Oh, I believe that Book." No. If you believe this Book, you must have faith in

Jesus Christ, because this whole Book is about Jesus Christ.

You know, that surprised the apostles when Jesus taught them that. You remember the conversation on the road to Emmaus after the resurrection, when the Lord Jesus Christ opened up His Old Testament and He said, 'Let me tell you something. This whole Book, this whole Old Testament, is about Me.'...and He preached the truth of Messiah, the Savior, from the Old Testament. Now, if that's true of the Old Testament, it's even more true of the New Testament. This whole Book is about Jesus Christ, and so if you believe in this Book, if you continue in this Book, if you persist in this Book, if you abide in this Book, you will trust in Jesus Christ.

You know, it ought to be the aspiration of every Christian to live according to the word of God. Every Christian ought to be saying, in all the fullness of its meaning, with the psalmist, "How I love Your word, O Lord." I love every word of Your instruction. That word of instruction shows me my sin, my need. It shows me the Savior, and Your grace. It shows me the way of faith and trust in Jesus Christ, and it shows me the way of life. This Book tells me everything I need to know to live in this world glorifying God and enjoying Him forever. And so every Christian ought to aspire to live according to God's word, and ought to delight in that word of God. God's word is truth, and we are to live by the Book. That's Paul's first exhortation to Timothy here.

And then he explains why we're to live by the Book, in verses 16 and 17. We're to live by the Book, he says, for three reasons. We're to live by the Book because the words of this Book come right out of God's mouth. They've been breathed right out of God's mouth, and Paul uses one long Greek word to express that whole sentence: that the words of this book come right out of the mouth of God. They're breathed out from the heart and mouth of God, and that's why we ought to live by this Book; because this Book has been breathed out by God.

And secondly, we're to live by this Book because it is the most practical book in the world, the Apostle Paul says.

And thirdly, we're to live by this Book because it tells you how to live with God, here and hereafter. And you're asking where do I get that from...well, look at verse 16 and 17: "All Scripture is inspired by God...." That's the phrase where Paul explains that the words of this Bible are the "breathed out" words of God. The words of this Book come right out of God's mouth.

"...And profitable for teaching." This Book is profitable. It's the most practical book in the world. It's not some airy fairy, speculative, theoretical, idealistic, ungrounded, unhelpful treatise: it's the most profitable, practical book in the world.

And notice, it tells you how to live life with God, so that "...the man of God [verse

17] may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” This Book tells you how to live with God.

Now let's look through those three things together very briefly, because there's a world of truth in those three glorious assertions.

## **I. Scripture is inspired.**

First of all, look at Paul's assertion, this triple assertion about the nature and qualities and usefulness of the word of God. The first thing that he says is that this Scripture is inspired. Now, we need to stop right there and say that very often when we say 'inspired' we mean something different than what Paul is saying here.

I'll never forget seeing a debate on the doctrine of Scripture at the University of Edinburgh when I was a student there. It was between a fine evangelical named Dr. Nigel Cameron, who was a dear friend of Doug Kelly's, and a Dr. Graham Auld, who was the head of the Old Testament department, and who was a radical liberal. And they were debating the doctrine of Scripture, and, specifically, the issue of inspiration. And so, at one point in the debate, Dr. Cameron said to Dr. Auld, “Tell me what you think ‘inspiration’ means. When you say that the Bible is inspired, when you quote II Timothy 3:16, what do you think ‘inspiration’ means?” And Dr. Graham Auld said exactly what you would expect a twentieth century person to do. (This was still in the twentieth century, when this debate went on. It was in the late 1980's.) He said, “I think the Bible is inspired, because it inspires me.” And Dr. Cameron rolled back in his chair, and he said, “Oh! You're a Coleridgian!” And he said, “A what?!?” And he said, “You're a Coleridgian! That's exactly what Samuel Taylor Coleridge said last century. And of course, it's completely wrong, and no Christian has ever believed that about the word of God.”

That's how Dr. Cameron responded to him, and of course he was exactly right. That was common for the crazy, romantic poets of the nineteenth century to say about inspiration and about Scripture, but this is not some sort of subjective inspiration (“the Bible is inspired because it inspires me”); this is an objective statement about the word of God. This is a statement which says that the words of Scripture are God's words: they are so much God's words that we can speak of them as being breathed out of His mouth. They are “God-breathed.” That's how you could translate that little word inspired in your English Bibles.

The words of Scripture are God-breathed, and the Apostle Paul is affirming here that all Scripture is God-breathed. And now notice several things about this: first of all, Paul asserts that all Scripture, not just some Scripture, is God-breathed. There are a lot of people who like to go through the Scriptures with scissors and paste and cut out things that they don't like, and believe some things and hand

off others. Thomas Jefferson, our President, early on went through his Gospels, and he but out all the miracles of Jesus Christ, because he said that no reasonable man could possibly believe that Jesus did these miracles. Now, Jesus' ethical teaching, oh, it's wonderful, it's inspired; it's the most wonderful stuff in the history of the world...love that. The miracles, though? Extraneous to Christianity. I'll cut them out of my Bible....

The Apostle Paul says though, all Scripture is inspired.

Notice also that he makes it clear that it's not just the writers of Scripture that are inspired, or their thoughts that are inspired: it is the words of Scripture that are inspired. Notice what he says: "...all Scripture." It's the little Greek word "all." All writings, all the writings, every Scripture is inspired. It's not just that God moved by the Holy Spirit in holy men, though He did; it is that He caused them to write in various means and ways precisely His message to His people. The Bible is inspired, and the reason that we believe that God's word is inerrant and without error, and authoritative, is because it is the word of God.

You remember Paul saying to the Thessalonians, "I thank God that you received my word not as the words of men, but for what it really is: the word of God." You see, that's an apostle realizing that the word of Scripture is the word of God. And so we have a high view of Scripture as Christians, because the Bible tells us so. The Bible tells us, here's how you are to think about this Book. God tells us in His word how we're to think about His word.

Do you know, my friends, that the very denomination of which this congregation is one part, exists because there were men who were committed to make sure that every man, woman, boy, and girl in this congregation would benefit from teaching of the word of God which viewed the word of God as it ought to be viewed...had a high view of Scripture, as opposed to a low view of Scripture.

There are low views of Scripture everywhere in the world. I would simply challenge you young people today, if you've bumped up into someone who has a low view of Scripture, who views the Scripture as an amorphous collection of religious fairy tales from thousands of years ago, or believes some parts of it to be good and other parts of it not to be so good...let me just give you a challenge. What belief about Scripture would you rather adopt, if you're going to be a Christian: the belief of twenty-first century people, removed twenty centuries from Jesus Christ, or the belief of those who knew Him? Would you rather go with the latter or with the former? Would you rather go with apostles who knew Jesus Christ, or those who've come along in the last twenty years?

Well, Paul is telling you *all* Scripture is inspired. And of course, Jesus Himself will say, "Not one jot or tittle of this word will fail, until it's all been fulfilled." And He'll say, "Lord, Your word is truth; sanctify them in the truth." Jesus Himself teaches that the Bible is our final authority for faith and practice.

And of course that's where Paul is going here. He doesn't just want us to have a theoretically high view of Scripture.

You know, I very much doubt that there are members of First Presbyterian Church who would be willing to stand up and say, "You know, this Bible stuff is ridiculous. Who in the world would want to believe the Bible?" I mean, you suffer under the teaching of the word of God every Lord's Day. Why in the world would you do that if you didn't believe that this Book was the Book which you were to live life by? But, it is one thing to say that you have a high view of this Book; it is another thing to live like you have a high view of this Book.

The Pharisees had a theoretically high view of the Bible. But Jesus said that they made that Scripture void by teaching the doctrines and commandments of men. And my friends, we have the same challenges today. We can say that we have a high view of this Book, and by our choices, by our attitudes, by our lives we can show that we do not have a high view of this Book.

Paul is calling Timothy, Paul is calling the Ephesian Christians, Paul is calling you and me not just to say that you have a high view of the Book, but to live by the Book! You believe this is the inspired word of God? Live by the Book! Live by the Book where it makes you uncomfortable; live by the Book where you struggle to understand and grasp the truth of this Book.

I was in a meeting, and there was a fine, a wonderful, evangelical, Anglican pastor/theologian there. He used to be Dean of the Cathedral of the Advent in Birmingham, Alabama. And he was doing a devotional, I think, from Isaiah 50:11, and he spoke about how God would restore and strengthen the weary ones with a *word*; and he said this in his devotional...he says, "You know, I very much resent the word-centeredness of the Reformed faith. I very much resent it, because I like pictures, and I like video, and I like the images that are shown me." And then he went on to discourse about the glories of the new *Star Wars* movie, and all the visual spectaculars that went along with it. But he said, "Though I very much resent the word-centeredness of the Reformed faith, because my personal inclination is to like pictures and images and video, I accept the word-centeredness of the Reformed faith, because that's what the Bible teaches." And I thought, what a wonderful example. Here was a person whose every inclination was to want something else, but when he came to the Book and the Book told him, 'You're wrong, God's right,' he said, 'Lord, You're right, I'm wrong. I'll go with the Book.' And my friends, there are a hundred applications of that to us today, because all of us have certain inclinations that are out of accord with the Book. When we come to the Book, do we make the Book fit our inclinations? Or, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, are our inclinations changed, and our obedience brought into accord with the Book?

Well, there's the first thing: The Bible is inspired.

## **II. But the Bible is also profitable.**

It's useful, it's beneficial. Notice what he says: "All Scripture is inspired by God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." In other words, the Apostle Paul is telling you that Scripture is not only God's very word, but that it's useful, it's helpful, it's profitable.

A lot of people will say, you know, it's the job of the preacher today to make the Bible relevant. Well, I want to tell you, the Apostle Paul says, 'No! It is not the job of the preacher to make the Bible relevant: it already is! It's the job of the preacher to make sure that he doesn't make the Bible irrelevant, because the Bible is already relevant! It's already helpful! It's already useful! It's already profitable!

You know, you wouldn't think it very profound if somebody got up here and gave a lecture on gasoline in which they said, "Gasoline is relevant to the running of an automobile engine." You'd think, 'You are wasting my time, because you are stating the obvious!' Well, to talk about the word of God simply being "relevant" is wasting our time, because it's stating the obvious. It's not only relevant, it's absolutely essential, just like gasoline is absolutely essential to running the internal combustion engine. The word of God is helpful, it's useful, it's profitable; it's the most practical Book in the world.

And Paul says it's practical for teaching, for instruction, for imparting the truth. He says that it's practical for reproof or admonition; for warning us against the errors that we're liable to. It's practical for correction, for redirecting us—the positive side of warning, for rectification of wrong beliefs and wrong conduct. It's practical for training in righteousness, for discipline, discipling and preparing the believer in godliness. The Bible is practical inherently; and the only reason we don't always think the Bible is practical is because sometimes we're interested more in other things than God is telling us about in His word. So when we think of the Bible as impractical, we need to have a quick heart-check, because this Book is never impractical. It is always practical about the first and most important things of life.

## **III. The Bible is sufficient.**

And then finally, notice that this Book is not only inspired and practical, it is sufficient to prepare us for life and godliness.

Look again at verse 17: "...that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

In other words, this teaching of which we're to have a high view is designed not



simply so that we will know facts about our Bibles; not simply that we will assent to the doctrines that are taught in the Bible. This teaching of God's word is designed to equip us for holiness. Remember again Jesus' words: [John 17] — "Lord, Your word is truth; sanctify them in truth." Make them holy in truth; grow them up in godliness, in Your truth.

God's truth is for the purpose of leading to holy living, to godly living, to growing in grace. And we really don't have a high view of Scripture until we love and cherish that Scripture and obey and live that Scripture. That's our prayer: that there will be a day when every professing disciple in this congregation [does] not simply assent to the truth that this is the inspired word of God, but is fully committed in reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit to living out that truth. May God transform us by His truth. Let's pray.

*Lord God, we thank You for Your word, and we pray that we would feed upon Your truth, that we would be directed by Your truth, and that by Your Spirit You would make us to believe and live Your truth. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

*This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.*

*Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement.*

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our Theological Editor.

#### **Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine***

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).