

II Timothy 3:16-17 Scripture Alone

Introduction

‘Who says?’ is a natural human response when someone is being asked to do something they are reluctant to do? The question of authority and the basis on which we come to make decisions about the most important things in our lives is central to our existence and identity as human beings. In the last fifty years the notion of objective truth has been challenged by French philosophers in particular who argued in very simplistic terms that all truth is subjective, ‘your truth’ or ‘my truth’ but certainly nothing as arrogant as ‘the truth’! The worldview on which it is based has spread throughout the Western world in particular with a deeply corrosive effect. We now see the phenomena of ‘fake news’ in which complete fiction is dressed up as fact and presented as such. You may say that it doesn’t impact your life. It might not, but when it is reported (hopefully truthfully!) that five of the most significant news stories that influenced how people voted in the last American Presidential election were ‘fake News’ stories then it is an increasingly serious problem. What is more important to grasp is the intolerance with which people who hold to objective truth are targeting for their ‘intolerance’. You may have noticed over the last few years how certain journalists have targeted Tim Farron, leader of the Liberal Democrats, in effect questioning whether someone who claims to be a Christian could be suitable to lead that political party. The irony of their intolerance against him, and his right to hold personal convictions at variance with theirs, is completely ignored!

The question of authority was central to the changes that came about 500 years ago in what was later called the Protestant Reformation. In Western Europe the Roman Catholic Church had held total sway over medieval society claiming that the final authority over faith and practical was the Pope in Rome. Under him stood equally the Bible and Church Tradition, that is how Christians in the past had interpreted and practised their faith. Yet there was a high degree of corruption in the Catholic Church at the highest levels and the morality of many of its priests was also problematic. The immediate catalyst that brought things to a head was the work of the Dominican Friar John Tetzl who was selling indulgences (a ticket to prevent you spending time in purgatory after death) across Germany. The money raised was used to build the basilica of St Peter’s in Rome. His famous slogan was: ‘When the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs’. A German Augustinian monk Martin Luther was horrified by this campaign and posted his famous Ninety-five theses on the door of the Church at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. He was looking for reform within the Roman Catholic Church at that stage, but as the challenge he made was printed all over Germany and approved of by many Christian people it led to a movement that could not easily be crushed by the papacy. Luther was summoned to a Roman Catholic council meeting, the famous Diet of Worms in 1521 and ordered to recant his challenge to the papacy. His reply in translation was this: I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Here I stand. I can do no other. May God help me. **Scripture alone** is our final authority on all matters of faith and conduct. Scripture alone conveys the revealed mind of God. All creeds and confessions of faith or Declarations of Principle are secondary standards or summaries of belief. The Word of God alone has final authority. Officially Protestant Churches over the last five centuries have held to this conviction of the Bible alone as our final authority and revelation of the mind of God on the subjects on which it speaks.

1. The Authority of God's Word (II Tim. 3:16a)

(a) **The Scope of Inspiration** *All Scripture is God-breathed* notice - *All Scripture* not some of it – the entire book from Genesis to Revelation. Paul has made this declaration to a young pastor Timothy whose life had been transformed by the power of God and who had trusted the Lord in his youth and then entered into itinerant ministry through the witness of Paul some years earlier, prior to serving as a pastor in the large city of Ephesus. In context Paul begins in II Timothy 3:14-15 to recall Timothy's journey of faith. ¹⁴*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.* The Word of God was sufficient to bring him to faith in Christ as the Old Testament pointed him to Jesus. Remember on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:27, it states: *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.* Already by the time of this book being written in the 60s AD, just over 30 years since the Church of Jesus Christ began on the Day of Pentecost both Old and New Testament books were treated as Scripture and therefore authoritative. In I Timothy 5:18, in a section concerned with how to care for church leaders (elders), there are two biblical quotations: ¹⁸*For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."* The first quotation comes from Deuteronomy 25:4 in the Old Testament and the second from Luke 10:7 - Luke's Gospel in the New Testament.

(b) **Paul's View of Scripture** Paul was expecting his writings to be read in church services. Colossians 4:16 states: ¹⁶*After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.* Paul claimed to speak with the full authority of Christ as if Christ were literally speaking through him. In Galatians 4:14 he described how the Christians in that part of what is now called Turkey welcomed him to their churches: ¹⁴*Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus Himself.* His message he called 'the word of God'. I Thessalonians 2:13 declares: *And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, **the word of God**, which is at work in you who believe.* Paul was conscious of the nature of the words he was using in his first letter to the church at Corinth. *This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words* (I Cor.2:13). The words of Scripture are God's words uttered by human beings inspired by the Holy Spirit.

(c) **Peter's View of Scripture** Peter made the same point in 2 Peter 1:21: *For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* God directed the thoughts of the people who wrote the Scriptures so that the words they used, the message they conveyed, was what He wanted them to communicate yet in words and expressions natural to them. There is no notion of divine dictation yet the Scriptures we possess accurately convey the truths God wants us to receive from Him. Peter in II Peter 3:16 speaks of Paul's letters in the same way *as the other Scriptures.*

(d) **Jesus' Use of Scripture** *All Scripture is God-breathed* that is, He directed its creation and it is accurate and reliable on whatever subject it speaks. Jesus stressed this point in John 10:35 when He declared: *and the Scriptures cannot be broken* (wrong), even down to the letters of the original version of the text in the original languages (Matthew 5:18-19). It is not without significance that Jesus confirms the authenticity of some of the events of Scripture that have been most challenged by critics in recent centuries. For example the from Creation account in Genesis he draws attention to the uniqueness of humanity and the foundational nature of marriage for the family unit in society (Matthew 19:4-5 see Genesis 1:27; 2:24); In Matthew 24:37-39 a clear reference to

the flood in the days of Noah pointing out that immediately prior to His second coming the world will be in as big a mess as that experienced before the flood. He confirmed the historicity of the story of Jonah and the great fish that swallowed him for a temporary period of time (Matthew 12:39-41) together with the disaster that swallowed up Sodom in the days of Lot (Luke 17:29) and the reality of a physical created fallen heavenly being called Satan (Luke 10:18). There are various books of the Bible whose authorship is denied by liberal theologians like the Sixth Century BC prophet Daniel (affirmed by Jesus in Matthew 24:15) and the Eighth Century prophet Isaiah (Mathew 15:7). If Jesus had total confidence in the Scriptures we can do also. He who is *the truth* (John 14:6) declared equally in John 17:17 *Your Word is truth* – the wedge that some people want to put between Jesus as the Word of God and the Scriptures does not have the support from the Bible itself that speaks with a clear voice on this matter. In addition to its authority Revelation 22:18-19 declares with a clear voice that Scripture is sufficient and warns about the severest penalties that God will inflict on anyone seeking to add to or take away from His complete revelation Genesis-Revelation.

2. The Clarity of God's Word

The Psalmist wrote: *Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path* (Psalm 119:105). John Knox, one of the most prominent Scottish Protestant Reformers once declared: 'You shall believe God who speaks plainly in His Word.' Charles Hodge, one of America's greatest Systematic theologians wrote: 'The Bible is a plain book. It is intelligible by the people'. In other words the Bible means what it says and says what it means! God spoke clearly to His people Israel in the Old Testament about how they should live in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). Large chunks of the rest of the Exodus to Deuteronomy is simply application to their social context of the Moral Law. The clarity of the message was excellent. It is interesting that the gods of the pagan nations around them were visible but silent; whereas the God of Israel Deuteronomy 4:12-13 reminds us: *Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; **there was only a voice.*** ¹³ *He declared to you His covenant, the Ten Commandments, which He commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets.* In the New Testament likewise there were key moments when God spoke, for example at the baptism of Jesus. Matthew 3:16-17 states: *As soon as Jesus was baptised, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on Him.* ¹⁷ *And a voice from heaven said, 'This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.'*

God's Word is also effective. Isaiah 55:10-11 reminds us: *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,* ¹¹ *so is My word that goes out from My mouth: it will not return to Me empty, but will **accomplish what I desire** and **achieve the purpose** for which I sent it.* In the New Testament Hebrews 4:12 highlights the power of God's clear message when the Holy Spirit uses it to change someone's life. *For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.* No other book in existence combines such clarity and power in changing lives. It is a book for the whole family to ready study and understand together. To Old Testament Israel God gave this clear instruction in Deuteronomy 6:6-7: *These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.* ⁷ *Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.* ⁸ *Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.* ⁹ *Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates.* Unlike the rabbis of His day Jesus welcomed the children at His meetings (Mark 10:13-16). Time and again Jesus challenged religious leaders for their failure to follow the clear teaching of their Bible- the

Old Testament. This does not mean there are no difficult to interpret passages of Scripture. There are some we struggle to understand. However, on basic principles of the faith and foundational teaching the way of salvation in both the Old and New Testaments is clear to see and understand. No-one needs an official interpreter we can read and understand it ourselves.

3. The Sufficiency of God's Word

John Calvin, the prominent sixteenth century Swiss Reformer once remarked: 'Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit. Just as nothing is omitted that is both necessary and useful to know, so nothing is taught except what is expedient to know.' The most influential and widely adopted Baptist Confession of Faith, the 1677 London Confession, begins its opening section on Scripture in these words: The holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith and obedience; although the light of nature and works of creation and providence do so far magnify the goodness, wisdom and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and His will, which is necessary unto salvation. Scripture is not our only source of knowledge about the world around us, there are many sources of information from which we can learn. However, the Bible is our final authority and its contexts are sufficient for all that we need for faith and practice. In summary form:

(a) Sufficiency means everything necessary to glorify God, save sinners and live the Christian life are provided in the Bible

(b) Sufficiency means that the sixty-six books of the Bible must not be increased or decreased. The canon of Scripture is closed. God has inspired His people to recognise His Word for His people. Revelation 22:18-19 makes this very clear. *I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: if anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. ¹⁹ And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.* From Marcion the wealthy ship owner and rabid anti-Semite who died around 160AD who wanted to omit the Jewish parts of the Bible! To other religions like the Church of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) who want to add other books to the Bible, we declare that God's Word is sufficient. In addition, we also reject the attempts by the Roman Catholic Church to add the books of the Apocrypha to the Bible, because their beliefs about purgatory, for example, are not found in the Bible. Protestants have sought to declare that the Bible alone is sufficient for faith and practice. Other books may be profitable to read but they are not Scripture.

(c) The sufficiency of Scripture requires us to reject as revelation other books but it accompanies the necessary inward illumination of the Holy Spirit. I Corinthians 2:9 states: *However, as it is written: 'What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived' – the things God has prepared for those who love him – ¹⁰ these are the things **God has revealed to us by His Spirit.*** This is why it is important to pray for God to speak through His Word to us when we come to it.

4. The Value of God's Word (II Timothy 3:16b)

and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness

(a) **For Teaching** (doctrine) –those fundamental beliefs that give the framework to our faith. The basic instruction we receive about our relationship with God when we come to know Jesus and then building on that as we grow in fellowship with God and other Christians. Are you growing as a Christian? Is your Bible knowledge improving as you invest time in its study and reflection on its application to your daily life. To suggest that Scripture is boring or unimportant is an insult to our great God who inspired its creation and desires us through the

Scriptures to grow in our relationship with Him. If you are in love with someone and they sent you love letters might you not want to read them more than once and to keep them safe somewhere to read again to bring blessing to yourself? If we love the Lord make time to invest in getting to know what is on His heart, learning how best to apply His truth in daily life. There are vast numbers of Christian books that can help us. Jesus at the age of 12 was in the Temple in Jerusalem learning from and conversing with the religious teachers of the day (Luke 2:46). The Psalmist said in Psalm 119:11 *I have hidden Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You*. The memorisation of a small number of key Bible verses, for example ones that may be helpful in pointing out how to become a Christian to a person seeking information about becoming a Christian, such as John 3:16; Romans 3:23 and 6:23.

(b) **For Rebuking** If someone advocates something God disapproves of then there has to be correction. The Word of God is given to us to help in this process. How did Jesus correct Satan in the wilderness temptations in Matthew 4:1-11? Three times He declared: *It is written* God has spoken authoritatively –in His case quotations from the book of Deuteronomy (Deut. 8:3, 6:16, 6:13); The Word of God settled the argument even when the devil tried to misuse Scripture to get Jesus to do something that was wrong. In our beliefs and conduct the Word of God is the final arbiter under whose authority His children are called to submit. In matters of church discipline and the resolution of personal relationship issues between Christians Matthew 18:15-18 sets the pattern for us to follow.

(c) **For Correcting** rebuking stresses a negative aspect of pastoral care whereas this word here implies the positive directing of a person to God's pathway. A person may need for example to be rebuked for stealing some money; slandering someone else's reputation or committing sexual immorality. Here the emphasis is on guiding the person who had stepped out of line back into the best way forward for them in their faith. Apollos the gifted young preacher mentioned in Acts 18:24-26 on some topics was an outstanding preacher, yet on some issues he got things quite wrong out of ignorance of biblical teaching. He was invited to live in the home of Priscilla and Aquila, colleagues of Paul who *explained to him the way of God more adequately*. All of us at times need the help of other Christians to understand and apply God's Word. This is so often experienced in more informal home Bible study groups but we can learn on our own or in other ways as we seek to grow as believers in the Lord. What a difference this couple made by the time they spent with this young man.

(d) **Training in righteousness** The word used here was used in secular education at that time for basic education for the few children fortunate enough to get to school. Paul is implying discipleship training with various courses that help us learn more about what we believe and how we ought to behave and then how to share our faith with other people so that they too can come to know Jesus. At times we have refresher courses of various kinds to refocus our minds on what our faith is about and the purpose of our lives here on earth.

5. **The Purpose of God's Word** (II Timothy 3:17)

so that the man [and woman] of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Aiming to know the truth and become better at putting it into practice; or getting back into our spiritual disciplines that we may have let slip as we have drifted away from our first love for the Lord? Is that true of you this morning? Do you need to renew your commitment to following the Lord or studying His Word? Have you a need to get back to a daily time of reading the Bible and prayer? In your home it would be good to make short times to pray together for the day in the morning or at the end of the day to thank God for getting you through or for giving you answers to situations for which you had previously been praying? Maybe you have never done that but now would be a good time to start, especially for those

of us who have children. In secular Greek the word translated *thoroughly equipped* was used of a wagon being thoroughly checked over, the ancient equivalent of a car having a thorough service. It was also used of boats being tested to prove their seaworthiness. It implies an ability to face the demands before us. God in His Word has provided all the information we need to know about Him, His character, about what He wants us to believe and what He wants us to do; how He wants us to live and to practice our faith in community with other people. God does not leave us to flounder but by His Holy Spirit will equip us to use and apply God's Word effectively in our daily lives.

What a precious gift God has given us –do you value it? What a practical gift He has given us –do you use it? What a powerful gift He has given us –do you share it with others even when appropriate sharing copies of it with other people? Never underestimate what God can do in speaking to people through His Word. If God has spoken to you this morning please obey His guidance, treasure His Word the most powerful and precious book available here on earth, Amen