

## 2 TIMOTHY 3:12-17

*Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, July 20-22, 2024*

*Smith*

### TRaCToR

**12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 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, 15 and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

God speaking into a bottle, and when you open it you hear his words. But he didn't use a bottle, he spoke through men who wrote it all down.

When Paul says that Scripture is "God-breathed," he's saying the very same thing we mean by "divine inspiration." There were about forty men that God used for about 1500 years: From Moses to Malachi, and then there was a little gap, but then the apostles Matthew and John wrote and the others like Paul and Luke who wrote in between them, for about 50 more years. God used their languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, he used their grammar, their way of talking, their talents for poetry or for history, or for outlined logical thoughts, but every word came from God. There is nothing in the Bible that is not from God; that is not God's holy word. Even the wicked things some people say in the historical parts are things God wants us to know about, to display his glory, to uncover our sins, and to proclaim our Savior Jesus. This act of giving his word through human writers is divine inspiration.

This teaches us that every word in the Bible is true. There are no contradictions in the Bible. When we can't understand something, that's a problem with us, not with the Bible. It's like-- one of my wife's degrees was in secondary education, and she taught many different math classes: algebra, geometry, trigonometry, calculus, and more. And if I pick one of her old text books that I still hang onto, I often can't follow what's being said or written about, but that doesn't make the textbook wrong. It's a flaw in me. And so it is with the Word of God. As a rule: Don't try to read Revelation, or Ezekiel, or even the Song of Solomon, until you have read everything else and until you are absolutely fluent in the Gospels and the letters of Paul, and Peter and John.

In our text, Paul knows that his life is almost over. He's been in prison before, but this time he's not getting out. This will be the end. It's important, then, for his colleague Timothy whom he's

know now for twenty years, to be careful of false teaching, and to clutch the true and clear doctrines of the Holy Scriptures. What do the Scriptures offer? They are useful, Paul says for these four things that are especially important for any Christian, but for a Pastor most especially. I remember these four things with the acronym TRCTR, or “Tractor” without the two vowels. They stand for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.

When we say “The Holy Scriptures,” it’s the same as saying “the Word of God,” “the Bible,” and so on. The writers will say, “the Lord said,” or “the prophet wrote,” or even “the hard things that Paul writes about,” but it is all the same as saying “the Scriptures,” “the Bible,” God’ Word. Other books can be profound. Other books, especially Luther’s Catechisms, can be priceless and useful for a lifetime of study. We can be edified by Shakespeare, by Tolkien, by Dr Suess. But Scripture has in its very essence the power of God himself. It is the power to change; a power that is always at work. And so Paul says it is useful for Teaching.

When we teach children, we begin with the stories of the Bible, especially the stories of the Gospels, but also the accounts of Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers, parts of the life of David, and certain prophets like Elijah, Elisha, and Daniel. Since small children can’t yet think in the abstract, a good foundation of the basic stories of the Bible is helpful later on.

When children enter into Middle School, they are capable of learning more difficult things, and we can move on to theology; the meaning of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the creed, and so on. With adults, there is the possibility of learning much more as life applications become possible; the more we study the Word of God, reading the text, and even learning something about the different styles of writing, and a deeper and more lifelong journey has been well-begun.

Scripture is also used and is useful for rebuking and correcting. These involve applying God’s will against our actions. To rebuke<sup>a</sup> is to point out an error or a sin. If it helps, it’s like tearing down a bad wall that’s doing no good anymore. Jesus does a lot of this in the Sermon on the Mount. To correct<sup>b</sup> is to build that wall back up again so that it will help and support. It’s to make improvements, and to guide, or even to coach, which is what books like Proverbs and James are so good at.

Paul also reminds us that Scripture is for training in righteousness. How do I live in a way that will please God? How can I make plans ahead of time to remove temptations from my day, or to encourage coworkers who are frustrated, or the plan ahead of time to avoid pitfalls or family arguments?

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<sup>a</sup> ἐλεγμός

<sup>b</sup> ἐπανόρθωσις

Paul wants “the man of God to be thoroughly equipped,” and this is a good time to remember that he’s talking to his colleague and friend Timothy, a fellow pastor, and telling him to keep himself well-versed in the Scriptures, to compare his life and his doctrine with what the Bible says so that he won’t be led astray by strange ideas and people’s obsessions with the chronology of the end times and things like that.

The Third Commandment is not only about keeping a day set aside for worship. Luther summarizes this in the Large Catechism: “It means nothing else that to devote the day to holy words, holy works, holy life. In itself the day needs to no sanctification, for it was created holy. But God wants it to be holy to you. How does this take place? Not when we sit beside the stove and refrain from external work, or deck ourselves with garlands and dress up in our best clothes, but when we occupy ourselves with God’s word and exercise ourselves in it.”<sup>a</sup>

I have spent most of my life in the study of God’s word. I am not done yet, not by a long way. I dare to say that none of us is. You and I have enough for eternal life-- yes, of course, we’ve had that since our baptism, since our confirmation. “From infancy,” like the Timothy in our text. But if you are thirsty, will you be content with a sip of water you had yesterday? Won’t you want a good long drink today? And tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow?<sup>b</sup>

If we don’t show up to hear God’s word, we’re acting as if it’s not important to us. This can happen when we stay away from worship, or if we don’t study God’s word on our own because we think that there are other things-- other concerns, other pleasures, that are more important. But we can also despise God’s word when we do hear it but refuse to take it to heart.

Jesus went to church, to the synagogue, as a regular, weekly custom (Luke 4:16). He did not always go as a preacher, but he also went as a worshiper, to listen, to pray, and to praise God his Father. He also died so that our sins of failing to love his word and submit to his word would be atoned for with his own blood. He bled for our Third Commandment sins on the cross. And three of the things he said there: beginning, middle, and end, were prayers.

The Scriptures make us wise for salvation. They make us realize more fully and more deeply day by day just how much we need a Savior, assuring us that we surely do have a Savior, and that Jesus alone is that Savior from all of our sins.

Study his Word. Worship him. Believe and obey his word, and pass that habit along to your children with love and excitement to be in the House of God, and encouraging each other, whether there are snacks or not, to feast on the Sacred Scriptures of Christ crucified for us.

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<sup>a</sup> Large Catechism 1:87-88

<sup>b</sup> Macbeth V:5