



Sermon Series: “Can 2 Timothy Edify Us?”  
“Scripture . . . Useful for Teaching”  
Preaching Text: 2 Timothy 3:14—4:5  
20 October 2013: 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
FUMC of Arlington, Texas 76011

Edify means to enlighten or to improve the morals or knowledge of someone.

Synonyms for edify are: enlighten, inform, educate, instruct, improve, or teach. So our question in this month’s worship series is: Can the Pastoral Epistles, most specifically 2 Timothy, teach us something? Let’s think of this sermon as a “teaching sermon,” may we? Our lesson is 2 Timothy 3:14—4:5:

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, 15 and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

4:1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: 2 proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. 5 As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully (2 Timothy 3:14—4:5).

In first century Palestine common wisdom said that a time of moral decay would precede the world’s end. It seems that Paul understands that the ethical corruption which results from false teaching is a contributing factor. Paul’s example is what the apostle holds up for Timothy to follow. Paul advances the difficult argument that even suffering for Christ is part of being a believer. While true Christians demonstrate righteousness, false teachers as Paul writes “will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived.”

Paul continues to urge Timothy to persist in what his elders have taught him (Paul, Grandmother Lois, and mother Eunice). Paul also advises Timothy to remember that the



Old Testament (“sacred writings”), interpreted by the Christian community (“faith in Christ . . .”) conveys “salvation” about Christ. Thus, “all scripture,” perhaps comprising even a few New Testament books, has a holy authority grounded in God. This authority is the foundation for human behavior. Scripture enables those who speak for God in holy teaching.

### **Where Did the Bible Come From, Exactly?**

Many people think that the Bible dropped from the sky into Moses’ arms. Thus God distributed Scripture to all who had interest—complete with Jesus’ teachings and Paul’s letters. Of course, as heartening as this may be, the Bible probably did not come to us in this remarkable way. Instead the writing, compilation, editing, and distribution of the Bible was a process that took approximately thirteen hundred (1300) years, give or take a century here or there. Nowhere in the Bible does Scripture claim for itself the status of “infallibility.” What Paul wrote to Timothy gives us the most basic contours of what Scripture claims for itself. Those who make grander claims for the Bible than it does for itself, simply go beyond the borders of the Bible’s own claims: All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

### **Principles of Discrimination and Interpretation**

Thus we set aside the issue of “infallibility” which has come to be a bone of contention in the modern Christian church’s Scripture understanding and this understanding of relatively late vintage. “Inspired” here simply means “God-breathed.” Here are a few guidelines that Christians employ with respect to their own judgment and interpretation of the Bible:

--We first recognize that the Bible is not essentially a book of science, but was composed in a pre-scientific age. The Bible never claims to tell us so much the **how** of things as it demands to get a hearing about the **why** of things.

--We can second make a distinction between **the content** of the Bible’s revelation



and **the symbols by which it conveys** that revelation. An example from the book of

Revelation is instructive:

And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him” (Rev. 12:7-9).

--Third, that the Bible’s revelation is a developing revelation and contained in the awareness that the NT is a fulfillment of the OT. It is plainly evident from the content of Scripture itself. This means that we have not merely the right, but the duty to distinguish within Scripture records between different levels of grasping God’s nature and purpose and rejecting the lower perceptions once and for all in favor of the higher.

An example concerns the institution of slavery.

Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy (Acts 2:18).

Acts assumes the institution of slavery because of the social context during its writing, but from the welter of evidence in the Bible itself, we now understand that human enslavement is contrary to God’s purposes for God’s children.

--Forth we need to guard against bringing our own theological/philosophical assumptions to biblical texts, thereby twisting them like pretzels to fit our preconceived notion about what we think the Bible said [See: *The Interpreter’s Bible*, Volume I, pp. 26 ff.]. Paul encourages Timothy with three primary faith resources: Paul, Timothy’s home life, and the testimony of Scripture. Timothy perseveres in faith by diligently clinging to these resources.

I once served a church that helped parents offer the gift that Timothy received. Each August in worship that church presented Bibles to three year olds. Someone wisecracked, “Everyone knows three year olds can’t read.” The earnest reply was that parents can and should read the Bible to children. Reading bonds parents and children and helps parents model their faith. Bible reading to children also fosters a



child's respect for Scripture. Paul knows Scripture is “useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” Is being three years old too early to nurture this attitude?

Olive Elaine Hinnant has written perceptively:

In these postmodern times, there are plenty of inspired teachers writing books and offering seminars on spiritual matters. The gospel gets buried among the “new” messages. Books such as *The Purpose-Driven Life*, *The Four Agreements*, *The Secret*, *The Prayer of Jabez*, and *A New Earth: Awakening Your Life's Potential* create a frenzy of excitement with their promises of a “new” being, a “new” start. In fact, some churches and parishioners study these books alongside the Bible. The desire for something new, like a spiritual fix or wisdom from on high, is part of what makes us human, and it is evident in every generation. As human beings we have a hunger, a thirst, a passion for what will inspire us and lift us out of the mundane, the ordinary (*Feasting on the Word: Year C*, Vol. 4: Propers 17-Reign of Christ).

I would like to take a stab at an analogy here. While it is true that investment strategies and financial tools can help us increase our net wealth, we can never begin to create prosperity and affluence unless we have the foundational building block—money as currency. While it is good to read things that inspire and encourage us, there is nothing more fundamental for believers than a good working knowledge of the Bible to amplify and inform our faith.

As Paul reminds us: “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

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