

“Core Values: Scripture”

Psalm 19:7-14 • 2 Timothy 3:12-4:4

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • January 29, 2017

This morning we are continuing our look at the core values and beliefs of our congregation that we put down in writing over the past few months. I want you to know how encouraged I have been by the response I've heard from some of you. These really are the things that we as a congregation value and believe and my hope is that they will help guide us as we plan for the future and that they will resonate with people outside our church.

Last week we looked at the core value of *life*. Remember that all people matter to God because they are created in the image of God. That means they should matter to us. But that value, which we find all through the Bible, really depends on the value we place on the Bible itself. That's what I want to talk about today.

In Wittenberg, Germany in 1517, Martin Luther, a monk and university professor, set into motion a series of events that would change the world forever when he posted his 95 *Theses* to the door of the church. While reading Romans Luther became convinced that salvation was only by the grace of God through faith in Jesus. At his trial in 1521, Luther was ordered to recant. He responded, “Unless I am convinced by sacred Scripture or by evident reason, I will not recant. My conscience is held captive by the Word of God and to act against conscience is neither right nor safe.” While the trial was about the authority of the church, the issue behind it was the authority of the Scriptures. From that point on the Reformers insisted on the idea of *sola Scriptura*, which means Scripture alone. What they meant is that only the Bible, the sole infallible rule of faith and practice, has the authority to bind the consciences of believers.

As a church, we have said that we value Scripture. The question, though, is what do we mean by that? Because almost every church says they value Scripture but they may mean something very different. So this morning I

want to elaborate on what *we* mean when we say we value Scripture. We'll begin by asking, What *is* Scripture? What is the nature of the Bible? How are we supposed to understand the words we read? What kind of authority does it have in our life? Each of us must answer those questions for ourselves because the way we view the Bible will shape our beliefs and actions in every other area of life.

Today there are basically three distinct ways of understanding the nature of Scripture and most people who consider themselves students of the Bible will lean toward one of these three. The first is what we could call “wooden literalism.” This is the idea that every word of the Bible means what it appears to mean on the surface. Those who read the Scriptures in a strict, literal way are rarely concerned with the context of a phrase because in their view it can only mean one thing. For example, when the Bible says that to God a thousand years is as one day, the wooden literal interpretation is that one day to God is 8 million 760 thousand hours. This view of Scripture is mostly about the rules and often leads to trying to enforce the rules.

Christians who read the Bible this way actually do so because they have a very high view of the text. Although they know that the words were written by people like the Apostle Paul or Moses or the prophets, they believe that each of the words was dictated by God himself and the human authors merely wrote what they heard.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who see the Bible as simply stories about how some people in the past experienced God in their lives. People who hold this view are also trying to deal with the fact that the Scriptures were written by humans who are by nature sinful and prone to error. However, they have come to the conclusion that the Bible is entirely human in its origin. They generally reject anything supernatural, including the miracles of Jesus. It's this understanding of the nature of

Scripture that several years ago led the Vice Moderator of the General Assembly to say candidly, "Scripture is only a reference point to the Word of God; it is not the Word of God. You know, the Word of God with a capital 'W.'" He went on to say, "Sola Scriptura is dead."

The problem with this view is that if the Bible is merely a collection of stories, it is not considered to have any authority. The things that the Bible calls sin are no longer considered sin because in this way of thinking those things were only for a particular time and place. I think this is what Paul means when he writes in 2 Timothy 4:3, "the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths."

But there's a third way to read and study scripture that has been at the heart of the Presbyterian Reformed tradition since the beginning. As I mentioned, one of the five watchwords of the Reformation was *Sola Scriptura* or "Scripture alone." The Reformers, like Martin Luther and John Calvin, were convinced that the inspired Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are our *only* ultimate and infallible authority for faith and practice.

This is exactly what we find Paul writing to Timothy in today's passage. Verse 3:16 says, "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 (which can also be translated "messenger of God") may be competent, equipped for every good work." We talk about the Scriptures being "inspired," which means breathed into. When our passage says that all Scripture is "breathed out by God" it is the same as saying that he has breathed *into* the original writers and in fact into the words.

Essentially, when we say that the Scriptures are inspired, we are claiming that the origin or source of the Scriptures is God himself. That's why we refer to them as the Word of God. We

recognize that it was various human authors who wrote down the words but the Holy Spirit guided and inspired them. As a result, the Reformed view of the Scriptures is that they are *infallible*. If something is infallible, it means that it is incapable of failing. Because God is the source of the Scriptures we are confessing that God is incapable of failing. But what exactly is it that the Scriptures are incapable of failing to do? Verse 15 says, "from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." John Calvin said the Scriptures are like reading glasses that help us to see Jesus more clearly.

Verse 16 says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." We don't use the word reproof much these days but it basically has to do with blame. The idea is that Word of God reveals to us our sin so that we may be corrected and trained in righteousness. What we're talking about here is discipleship. The purpose of the Scriptures is to point us to Jesus and help us become like Him, so that you and I may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Our core value states, "We believe the Bible...is the infallible written Word of God, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus, which teaches all that is necessary for faith and life. Therefore we value biblical preaching, teaching, and *learning*. If the Scriptures are going to train you for righteousness and equip you for every good work, it seems to me that it would be important to know what they say. Bible-based preaching and teaching are a big part of that. But remember, you are *living* to know Christ and to make Christ known. *You* have a responsibility to learn what God says in the Bible.

Let me end with an illustration. There were once two brothers who were out hunting together when they came across a small apple tree loaded with fruit. They discovered that the fruit was incredibly sweet and so they sat down and ate their fill of the delicious apples. As they

were leaving, one brother decided to take all of the remaining fruit home with him to enjoy later. The other brother, however, dug up the tree itself and planted it in his yard. The tree took root and flourished and regularly produced a bountiful crop of fruit so that this second brother often had fruit when the first brother had none.

Sadly, many of us approach the Bible the way the first brother approached the apple tree.

When exposed to the Scriptures we enjoy them and may even take some of it home with us. But in the long run, this doesn't compare with having our own tree. We need to be constantly hearing God speak to us through the Scriptures. As a church we have declared that we value the inspired, invallible Word of God. I pray that *you* will value it, too.

Amen.