The Believer's Standard

Text: 2 Timothy 3:16

The transcript of a sermon preached by Rev Matthew Winzer at Chadstone on 19/10/2025

Let us beseech the Lord that He might add His blessing to His word. O gracious God, how wise, to have a book, to have all the things revealed in ages past, of thyself, of thy will and counsel and purpose, to be wholly committed unto writing, that nothing should be lost. That Christ came that He might fulfil it, and has declared unto us all that is necessary for us to know, all the truth of God, all the righteousness, all the loving kindness of God to sinners. And how we pray then to love the Scriptures, as the complete and perfect record of all that thou hast purposed to do for thy people from eternity. May we then love the Scriptures, O God, and study them, and come to know them, and lay them up in our hearts, that we might be sure of the things that we believe, that we may be clear in the way that we live. And so bless thy Word to us, we pray. And again we ask that thou wouldst be with thy servants, that they might take this firm resolution of the psalm we just sang, to preach the whole counsel of God, and to leave out nothing that is profitable and useful for men to hear, but that they might testify of faith and repentance, faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and repentance toward God, and to walk in those ways that are pleasing to thee. So bless their labours, as they labour in Word and in doctrine – the very thing they are called to do, that they would not be turned aside from it. As we see there are great calls today to change the nature of the church, and the nature of its ministry. May they turn a deaf ear to those pleas, and may they rather be constrained and compelled by the call of God upon their lives. And we pray that as we give attention this night to the scriptures and to the ministry of the word, that as those words were put in the mouth of the prophets, so Lord, these things would come to take their place in our hearts, to be confessed by our mouths. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

We turn this evening, brethren, to the chapter we read in the New Testament, 2 Timothy chapter 3. Over the past weeks we have taken a short series on the cause of Christ, looking at isolated statements from the Apostle Paul in the book of 2 Timothy. This is considered to be his final letter. We can feel the weight and the warmth of the Apostle's words as his life draws to a close. He is living under the shadow of the executioner's blade, and he gives expression to his most cherished convictions.

So far we have seen him speak of the believer's commitment to the cause. "I know whom I have believed." This shows us his personal steadfast trust that anchors his soul to the person of Christ. Then he gave us the believer's foundation. "The Lord knoweth them that are His." In the chaos of a changing world, we do not stand on shifting sand, but on the unshakable, sovereign foundation of God Himself.

Well, this now raises a practical question. How then shall we live? If our hearts are committed to Christ and our feet stand on His firm foundation, what is to be our standard? What is to shape our thoughts and order our lives? It has been well observed that we live in an age of information, but not an age of wisdom. There are countless voices all around us. A person today can learn anything that he wants. It is all there on the Internet; yet people have never been more confused. What is the reason for that? They can hear anybody they want,

but they don't know whom to hear. What all these voices lack is the word of authority, a word that stands out from the rest and imprints itself on the soul. Without authority, it is all just noise.

The Apostle Paul, writing to Timothy, delivers a profound statement to turn his attention to the authoritative voice of God in Holy Scripture. In 2 Timothy chapter 3, Paul warns Timothy to be on his guard against apostasy. First, he was to turn away from the religious and moral decay of the culture in which he lived, verses 1 to 5. Second, he must not be impressed by charismatic leaders who, though they meet with much success, lead souls captive into error, verses 6 to 9. Third, he must not follow the consensus of growing wickedness, even among so-called spiritual guides, verse 13. The message to Timothy and to us is simply this. The standards of this world are broken. The popular opinion is corrupt and even religious success can be deceptive. If we are to turn away from all that, what must we turn to? It is found in the thing that Timothy had known from a child. It is the same sure and steadfast standard that had been there all along. This evening we come to the believer's unerring and enduring standard, the Holy Scriptures. In a world of shifting shadows, here is a fixed light. In a time of erroneous teachings, here is a clear voice.

Our text is 2 Timothy, chapter 3, verse 16, where we look at the believer's standard. Firstly, its *origin*. "All Scripture is given by inspiration." That is a statement intended to draw us back to the process by which Scripture came to be. It has proceeded from the mouth of God Himself. Secondly, its *obligation*. "It is of God and it is profitable." It carries His authority, but it also conveys His goodness. Then thirdly, its *occupation*. It is given to be useful for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

The Scripture's Origin

I. Firstly then, let us look at the origin of our standard. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. The basis of everything we believe about the Bible rests on this first monumental truth. Its origin is divine. Yet strange to say there is disagreement as to how we should translate the word Paul uses here. The New International Version says "All Scripture is God breathed." The English Standard Version says "All Scripture is breathed out by God." The New American Standard Bible says "All Scripture is inspired by God." In each of these versions, the emphasis is on the nature of Scripture. What it is. The Authorised Version takes us a step back. It speaks of the origin of Scripture, of where it has come from. It says Scripture "is given by inspiration."

The word Paul uses only appears once in the New Testament, and that is here in our text. But it was commonly used among those who wrote in Greek. It would be used to speak of wisdom, or a person's dreams, or of the greatness of an individual. In each case, they say that these things have been given by the gods. Paul, of course, does not speak of the gods in the plural. To us, there is only one God, as he says elsewhere. But it is the same idea. The Scriptures are given to us by God. Yes, it tells us about the nature of Scripture, but only by tracing it back to its origin in God Himself. The Scriptures are what they are because God is their source. They are the product of His inspiration.

The translation, Scripture is inspired by God, or Scripture is God-breathed, can lead to a vague idea that Scripture has some divine quality in it. In fact, I have noticed among people who use this language that they seem to speak as if the Scripture itself is divine, as if God is

breathing in the Scriptures. Then they find it very difficult to separate God and Scripture as two different things. We must remember that there is an infinite distance between God and His creation. Scripture is a created book. It is created by God, to be sure. It is His divine workmanship, but only God is divine in His nature. We can liken it to the creation of man. If you recall, when God created man, He formed his body from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. This is what Paul means here. God has breathed His Word into being, and the Scriptures are the thing that He has given by that process of inspiration. In other words, Scripture is what it is because it was given to men by the direct action of God.

It is not a human invention. It is a gift that has come down from heaven to earth. It is as if God is leaning over the balconies of heaven and calling out, as it says in Proverbs, "to you, O sons of men, I call." This is not a book we have discovered. It is a revelation we have received.

But now observe *what* is inspired. It is the Scriptures. The word Scripture simply means a writing. It is not simply the men who were inspired, but the words that they wrote down. The men who wrote the words were carried along by the Spirit, as we are told in 2 Peter 1 verse 21. But Paul is saying something more direct and more comprehensive. He is saying that the words put down in writing itself are inspired. This means that God breathed out the very words.

We see this in the call of Jeremiah. There you have a young man who is very hesitant about taking up the call to minister God's word. He can find many reasons why he should *not* do this. God gives him one reason why he *should* and that overcomes every objection. It is found in Jeremiah chapter 1 verse 9. "Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth." It is true the prophets were initiated and carried along by the Holy Spirit. But more than this, the very words they spoke and afterwards wrote down are the words of God.

You will find the apostles in the New Testament quoting the prophets with a preface that attests to this fact: "God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets." They were only the mouthpiece. The real author of these words is God Himself. Because of this we can be sure that what scripture says, God says; its words are His words.

In saying this I hope I am not misunderstood. If the words themselves are inspired it can only be referring to what the prophets and apostles wrote down. Indeed, not only the words but the very letters of those words are inspired. When Jesus spoke of the scriptures as God's Word He referred to jots and tittles. The jot or the *yod* is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. The tittle is a small stroke of the pen that distinguishes one letter from another. This is what God inspired. The very letters that make up the words. It is obvious then that this cannot refer to the translation that we have in our hands. That translation comes to us in different words with different letters.

But what is a word? It is a symbol of meaning. This is what Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 14 verse 10. "There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world and none of them is without signification," that is, without meaning. The voices or the languages only give expression to the things that men are thinking. And so it is that the words God has used in scripture give expression to His own thoughts. They are a revelation of God and His will.

This can be translated from one language to another. We can all hear the wonderful works of God in our own tongue. By the faithful translation of the Scriptures from one language to another, the meaning of the word is conveyed to us in the words of our mother tongue. The words are not inspired, but the meaning of the words are inspired. And this is what comes through in our translation.

So in reading God's Word in English, we can be sure that what the scripture says, God says. So far as it is accurately translated, we can say that these are the words of God in as much as the sense or the meaning is concerned.

Now Paul says this is true for all scripture. It is not just the moral teachings or the words of comfort or specific doctrines. In its entirety, from Genesis to Revelation, it is inspired. It is not a partial revelation with some parts being God's Word and other parts being human opinion. The whole of it in its unity and its diversity is the authoritative and infallible Word of God. We never have to resolve some lingering doubt as to whether a human thought has intruded itself at some point. If that were the case, we could never know which parts belonged to God and which parts belonged to man. That is practically the same as if we had no Wof God.

This is the dilemma of the liberal man who claims that the Bible only contains the Word of God. He has basically bound himself up in knots. And anyone who reads liberal commentaries on Scripture will see this in action. They are spent trying to separate the chaff from the wheat. And by the time they are finished, they are left with only a few grains of truth, and things we could have learned without the scriptures because nature itself teaches them.

No, dear friends, we have a book from God. And we can read it as if it has fallen out of heaven into our hands. It all comes to us as heaven's present to the souls of men. And what a gift it is, which leads us,

The Obligation of Scripture

II. Secondly, to its obligation. It is of God. Because the origin of Scripture is divine, it carries with it a divine obligation. It comes with His authority. Whenever we come to the Scriptures, it should be with a feeling that we have to do with God Himself. We are to receive it for the authority of God speaking in it. We are to approach it in order that we might understand the will of the Lord revealed in it.

We have a whole chapter of Scripture that is devoted to this very thing. It is Psalm 119. It magnifies the revelation that God has given of Himself in Scripture, teaching that His Word must be central to the life of every believer. This Psalm praises God's Word in the highest terms. It speaks of *His* testimonies. *Thy* precepts. *Thy* commandments. Everything in it belongs to Him. And it uses great variety to express God's will. It speaks of *words* as a means of communicating one's thoughts. *Law* as instruction in what is right and good. *Commandments* as directions given from a superior. *Precepts* as binding rules. *Statutes* as permanent regulations. *Judgments* that give just decisions. *Testimonies* that attest to certain facts. *Ways* to present a habitual course of action. These terms are used not only in the Psalm but throughout the Scriptures themselves. Together they show the finality and sufficiency of God's will revealed in His word. It is complete in every way.

This Psalm also sets forth God's attributes. The Word itself takes on divine characteristics. It is called "wondrous." "Forever settled in heaven." "Righteous and very faithful." "Very pure," and "true from the beginning." To praise the Word is to praise the God who has given it.

This Psalm also shows why His Word is the primary means of grace. It is the channel through which God pours out His blessings. How often does the Psalmist pray for something and then add "according to thy word?" "My soul cleaveth unto the dust. Quicken thou me according to thy word." "Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord. Even thy salvation according to thy word." "My soul melteth for heaviness. Strengthen thou me according unto thy word." Everything in the Christian life hinges upon it. Hope comes from it. "Remember the word unto thy servant upon which thou hast caused me to hope." Wisdom. "I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation." Guidance. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." And peace. "Great peace have they which love thy law and nothing shall offend them."

In saying this, however, we must be clear that the Word is a means of grace. It is not grace in itself. The Psalmist did not trust in the Word to work by itself. That would be idolatry – to trust the Word in the place of God. No. He repeatedly prays for God to bless the Word to him. "Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes." "Incline my heart unto thy testimonies." Only the Holy Spirit can make the Word effectual in our hearts.

This leads to a deep affection for the Word as the instrument God uses to bless him. God's grace received through the Word creates a gracious response in the believer. We see a wholehearted devotion to Scripture engaging every faculty of the person. "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day." "I will delight myself in thy statutes." "I will never forget thy word." "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever. For they are the rejoicing of my heart." It is what he submits to. "Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes and I shall keep it unto the end." "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee and I am afraid of thy judgments." "I made haste and delayed not to keep thy commandments." In fact you can see how this Word consumed his thoughts. "I will meditate in thy precepts and have respect unto thy ways." "I remembered thy judgments of old, O Lord, and have comforted myself."

You see then that our faith in God is demonstrated by our devotion to His word. A vibrant walk with God is impossible without making His Word our central focus, our greatest delight and our ultimate authority.

That is to speak positively. But there is a negative side to this as well. To disregard the Scriptures is to disregard God Himself. To disobey them is to rebel against the King of kings. The history of humanity is a testimony to a simple truth – no one resists His Word and prospers. We are not its judges. We are its subjects. We do not stand over it in criticism. We stand under it ready to obey.

But then Paul says something else also to commend the obligation of Scripture to us. He says it is profitable. This testifies to the goodness of God. In giving us the Scriptures, God has sought our benefit. He did not give us His Word to overbear us with His majesty and make us terrified. It is not to create a grievous burden that is impossible to bear. He has the concerns and interests of our souls at heart. That we might be wise. That we might be blessed. That we might be free. How sad is it to see brethren arguing over the Scriptures,

making it a point of division between them. What was intended to be a unifying asset is turned into a divisive liability. John Calvin gives us an important consideration here. He says, "Scripture is profitable. Hence it follows that it is unlawful to treat it in an unprofitable manner. For the Lord when He gave us the Scriptures did not intend either to gratify our curiosity or to encourage ostentation or to give occasion for chatting and talking. But to do us good. And therefore the right use of Scripture must always tend to what is profitable." God's Word is a gift of grace. Designed not for intellectual pride or for petty disputes. But for our ultimate good and His glory. And so it is to be used accordingly.

It is wonderful to think that God has a beneficial purpose in giving us the Bible. What is that saying? That in taking up the Bible you are taking up God's good will towards men. The Psalmist could speak of God's precious thoughts. "How precious also are thy thoughts, O gracious God to me. And in their sum how passing great and numberless they be." God has thoughts towards him. How did he know that? He read and understood the Scriptures. It is the book of God's good will towards us. Let us then take it to heart. This brings us to our third point.

The Occupation of Scripture

III. What is it profitable for? And this is its occupation. It is chiefly given for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. The Bible is not meant to sit on a shelf and gather dust. It is given for a purpose. To occupy us in learning it. That it might transform us in the process.

Its first use is for doctrine or for teaching. In other words it is given for our instruction. It is important to see this point. The Scriptures are inspired to instruct us. They are not given to inspire us. There are some who use the Bible for a few comforting thoughts and that is all. They need courage or they need relief. They have a few verses that speak to them. There are others, and they think of the Bible working in some mystical way. They speak of the Word doing things in their soul in some way that bypasses their intelligence. Our minds are clouded by sin and the world's deception. They must be renewed. We cannot understand the will of God by our own intuition. We must be taught. The Scriptures are our textbook revealing who God is, who and what we are, the reality of sin and the glory of the gospel. Doctrine is never dry. It is the foundation upon which a living faith is established and built up.

The Shorter Catechism speaks of what the scriptures principally or chiefly teach. "The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man." In other words, it is the infallible rule of faith and life. It is designed to give us sound and solid beliefs in the first instance. This means we need to study it with the aim to learn what it teaches.

There are consequences to not studying the Scriptures and these are very serious. How is it that people confess to be Christians and are still living in basic ignorance of its teachings? How is it that the life of religion is at such a low ebb today? Why are churches so easily moved by the current trends in our culture? Why is there such instability in souls today? I heard of a man who began reformed. Then he went to a general evangelical church. Then he became a Pentecostal, turned Greek Orthodox, then Roman Catholic, and now he is an atheist. Why are there so many errors that prevail in the churches? Where does all this fanaticism come from? Why are people so superstitious? And why is there such

a lack of holiness? Many of these things can be put down to a neglect of the doctrinal teaching of scripture. Were men better taught, they would be more steady in the cause of Christ.

But the Scripture does more than give us doctrine. Paul says it is useful to reprove us. It does not simply fill our minds. It confronts and challenges us. It comes to us as sinners who have gone astray and it points out what is wrong. It exposes our sin and error. It puts a divine finger on our sore points to bring us to the realisation we are not what we should be. And so you see the Bible has a negative message as well as a positive one.

We saw this in the calling of Jeremiah. After God put His Word in the prophet's mouth, He gave him a commission. Verse 10. "See, I this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms to root out and to pull down and destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant." There is a negative as well as a positive side to the truth. Negatively it must overthrow what has been put in place by man. Every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. It must take captive men's thoughts and show what is amiss, what is false, what is unworthy of the Lord. These things must be torn down and uprooted.

This means if the Word is doing what it is intended to do, it will make people feel uncomfortable at first. It is like a doctor who finds a bone that has been set crooked. He breaks it afresh. And so the Word will produce pain, conviction, and an unsettled conscience. Its aim is not to make us feel good about ourselves or to build up our self-esteem. We must be laid bare before God and humbled under His mighty hand.

But then it is also useful for correction. Scripture not only tells us what is wrong, but also sets us right. It shows us the way back. It begins to build and to plant. It shows us the highway by which God leads us into the promised land. Having broken the bone, he sets us straight again.

And finally, He trains us in righteousness. After the bone is set straight, He gives us exercises like a physiotherapist for strengthening the muscles around the bone so it can function as it was intended. The Word trains us in this way. First, it shows us the way to be right with God. It makes the doctrine of justification by faith alone a matter of central importance, revealing that we are accepted as righteous not by our works but through faith in Christ. And having declared us righteous, we are now called to live righteously. The Scripture is our training manual, our coach, our guide. I remember a number of years ago there was that colourful coach in the Olympic Games. He would walk up and down the pool while his trainee was swimming. With every stroke, he was yelling out to him those instructions that would perfect his technique. And it worked. The swimmer went on to win gold. So it is that Scripture goes with us as a companion and a counsellor in every step that we take in our walk with God. It shows us how to please Him, how to avoid snares, how to over-leap obstacles. It trains us, drills us, and disciplines us until the pattern of upright living is established in our lives. Why do you think that the Scriptures are filled with the lives of godly men? In order to show us through them what godly living consists in.

And so you see that scripture is profitable throughout our lives. It makes us wise to salvation, but it also aims at the complete renovation of our souls. Instructing our minds, confronting our sins, and training us in Christ-like living. Dear brethren, let us not neglect this great gift from heaven. Let us come to it daily, expecting to hear God's voice. Submitting to

its authority, even when it confronts and challenges us. And let us be trained by the Scriptures, so that we may, in the words of the verse following, be perfect, thoroughly furnished and equipped for every good work. May God bless His Word to our souls!

We conclude this evening in the words of Psalm 138, in which we see that God has even magnified His Word above His name. By means of it, He strengthens the man inwardly in his soul. That even kings will praise the Lord for His word, because through it we are directed in the righteous ways of God. Psalm 138, Thee will I praise with all my heart, I will sing praise to thee. Verses 1 to 5 of the Psalm.

Let us conclude with prayer. Lord, whatever kings may do, we as common people are very thankful for thy true and faithful word. For therein we have the food of our souls, the light to our path. It is therein that thou dost answer us, and we know that our prayers are always heard. It is there that we receive that inward strengthening when we feel so weak and we are trembling. We thank thee, Lord, that in thy Word we have a humbling, a convicting, that which works like a hammer and a fire to beat our pride out of us, to purge us of our sins and our lusts. All these things thou hast made thy Word effectual to accomplish for thy people. May we then love it and take this book in our hands to read and to study it every day, to know our God and the will of God through it. So teach us, we pray. May we profit from the Scriptures, from the book itself, and from the preaching and expounding of it, that we may grow in our knowledge and understanding. So be with us and bless us, we pray, and pardon us our sins, in Jesus' name. Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you now and forever. Amen.