

How the Word Works / 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Good morning church, if you have a Bible go ahead and grab it and turn to 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

This passage is the foundational passage for our series on the Bible so I thought we might take a deep dive into it this morning.

I just have a couple of things to help us place this passage in context before we jump into our passage this morning.

In 2 Timothy Paul is in prison as he was when he wrote 1 Timothy, but his outlook on the future has changed. Now in writing 2 Timothy, he understands that his time in this world is coming to an end.

So Paul is giving Timothy encouragement, instruction, and a challenge to keep being faithful in following Jesus, preaching Jesus, and caring for the churches of Jesus.

This book as a whole tells us Paul's parting words to one of his closest ministry partners of his life and he wants Timothy to know that he has nothing to offer others unless it is the God Breathed word of God.

So let me read these two verses, pray, and we will get rolling this morning.

2 Timothy 3:16–4:1 (ESV)

¹⁶ *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,*

¹⁷ *that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

Pray.

Bart Ehrman Story¹

Many of you know I went to seminary at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary which is located in Wake Forest, NC, just outside of Raleigh.

Where we lived was only about 45 minutes or so from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a pretty well known school especially if you are a fan of college basketball.

However many folks don't know that at UNC there is a New Testament professor who is actually an atheist.

I know that sounds pretty strange, but sadly that happens in the scholarly biblical studies world. There are many biblical scholars that simply study the Bible as a historical book without any consideration of how its truths affect their lives.

¹ Story told by professors and friends at SEBTS who went to UNC.

One thing this professor does each year is he tries to make those in his class who are followers of Jesus doubt their faith and their trust in the Bible.

First he asks the class who in the room would claim to be a Christian and many in the room raise their hands.

Next he will ask the class how many have read the most recent best seller book on the market or who has read all of the Harry Potter books, and again many will raise their hands.

Then he asks the Christians, how many of you have read the whole Bible. And sadly none or just a couple would be able to raise their hands.

Then he points out that many who claim to be Christians and trust the Bible with what it says about their salvation and where they will go when they die haven't bothered to read the whole thing.

And it's from this exercise he begins to try and dismantle students' faith.

Now I'm not going to ask the same question about who has read the whole bible in the room, but if God's word is really from Him it might do us good to invest in it.

We need to know God's word because God uses his word to work in us to be who he called us to be.

#1 God Meets with His People Through His Word

The first way we see the Word work is that God meets with his people through his word.

This comes from our first phrase, *All Scripture is breathed out by God.*

A. All Scripture is from God

Paul here wants Timothy to be reminded that all scripture, every verse, is from God.

For believers today this means that from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21 is from God our Father.

This book has come from God, not a man, a council, or a government, but from the creator of all things.

Not only does Paul testify about this truth of scripture being from God so does the apostle Peter. In 2 Peter 2:16-21 he explains how he was a witness to Jesus' ministry, life, death, and resurrection.

Then he explains where the scriptures come from,

²⁰*knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.*

²¹*For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

So Peter here confirms that scripture is from God through men, not from men.

Our Bibles are words from God. Not just a book about God, there are many of those I read in seminary and you can buy today.

No Paul and Peter are telling us that the Scriptures are words from God himself.

Sit with that. We have a word from the Lord. We have 66 books of words from the Lord.

God is not hiding himself, he wants us to know him.

If God is the author of this book, then we know that by spending time in his word we get to know him and understand him.

He has given his word to us so that we might meet with him, come to know him, and enjoy being in fellowship with him.

John Grisham Illustration

I can remember being introduced to the books of John Grisham in seminary.

I knew he was a Mississippi author and had written several books that were made into movies but other than that I had never read any of his books.

And when you are in seminary you need non-theological books to read between semesters to give your mind a break from all the reading you are doing in class.

So I decided to read *A Time To Kill*, and then *The Firm*, and on and on I read several of his books and was just hooked.

I still have many more to get through. But something happens when you begin to read book after book of one author.

You begin to know that author.

You know how their stories are going to go, where the twist and turn is going to go. You even pick up on how their own experiences and personal stories shape their writing.

You might see their views on cultural and political issues shown in the book

Either way the more you read of that author the more to meet with them.

The same can be said about the Scriptures. The more you engage in the Bible, the more you will know the author.

B. All Scripture is Life Giving

Something else we learn from this phrase is that scripture is life giving.

This comes from the word “breathed out” or some translations say “God-breathed”.

This word, theopneustos, is only used once in the whole bible which is here in this verse.

The word is actually the combination of “theos” which means God and “pneo” which is wind, breath, or spirit.

Although this word is only used here there are a few other passages that capture the same idea that Paul is giving us here.

The first is in Genesis 2 in verse 7 which says, *“then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.”*

Psalm 33:6 says, *By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.*

And Isaiah 42: 5 says, *Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it.*

In all these examples where God is connected to breathing or breath it is in reference to him giving life.

In our passage this morning, Paul is explaining that all scripture is from God but also that God gives scripture life.

If we invest in God’s word and spend time in it the word of God will bring life because that is how God has designed it.

Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the whole bible is a testament to the life-giving value of the scriptures.

Personal Illustration

I can see this truth play out in my own life.

I know of several times when I am at home and might be in a bad mood, or have a lousy attitude Amber might pick up on it.

Then after a while of dealing with my bad mood and attitude, she will gracefully ask me, have you spent time in the word yet today?

It's her nice way of saying, you need some Jesus.

You need some time with the life giving scriptures.

This is true of most of my days, my days are completely different when I spend time in God's life giving word and many of you know how much of a difference it makes in your day to day life.

So the first way God's Word works in us is that through it God meets with us and gives us life through it.

#2 God Changes His People Through His Word

Next, we see in the second half of verse 16 that God changes his people through his word.

We see this mainly through a process that Paul explains as Teaching, reproof, correction, and training, but first Paul explains that this process is profitable.

When we think of the word profitable, we usually think of investments, stocks, retirement.

If you went to a financial advisor and he told you of a stock that would never fail and in fact it would actually be profitable year after year.

He could guarantee it would always bring a return on your investment, you would be sure to put as much money in that stock as you could.

You wouldn't diversity your investments; you would put all your eggs in that basket.

Here Paul is saying the same but instead of money and stocks, he is talking about time and God's word.

It will always be profitable for you to invest in God's word because it is one way he uses to change us.

A. By Teaching

The first way we see this happen in the process is by teaching.

The Scriptures tell us where we come from, what went wrong in the world, if there is any hope for us, and it tells us what the future holds.

It teaches about everything from marriage to money.

Ultimately it teaches us about the good news of Jesus.

About how we were once without hope in the world but Jesus, God's son came to become like us, to give his life for us, and defeat sin and death and to offer us a new life in Him.

The Scripture might not teach us everything in every subject under the sun, but it usually has something to say about every subject under the sun.

The Scripture has so much to teach us that if you haven't noticed basically every time you come to church someone is talking about what the bible says about something.

Every Sunday and Wednesday we do the same thing week after week, open to the bible and seek to explain what it says because the Scriptures teach us.

B. By Exposing

The next way God changes us with his word is by reproving us, which is another way of saying exposing things in us.

The Scripture in many ways acts like a mirror for us to examine our lives in.

As we come under the scriptures teaching and authority in our lives there are areas in our lives that get exposed.

We begin to realize that there are parts of our lives that have been outside of God's desire and design for us.

The scripture exposes our sin, our motives, our idols, our thoughts, our marriages, our parenting, how we spend our money, how we talk to others, how we treat others, and every area of our lives in between.

The scriptures don't just teach us what we are to do and expose the areas in our lives where we aren't doing those things, it also corrects us.

C. By Correcting

And the next way that the word works in our lives is through correction.

God's word is so gracious to not only teach us what to do to begin with, and then expose our sin when we don't, but it also shows us how to make things right.

The scriptures expose our wrong doing, but then give us a way forward. It says don't do that, instead do this.

One example of this is found in a sermon on the mount where Jesus explains the wrong way to do things then the right way.

In chapter 6 it says.

And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Lay Up Treasures in Heaven

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Do Not Be Anxious

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

³⁴ “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Here Jesus is exposing the wrong way of fasting, dealing with your money, and spending your time being anxious and then gives the correct ways to fast, spend money, and to trust in the Lord instead of living in constant anxiety.

This is only one example but this correction from the scriptures is found in the Old Testament and the New.

So we see that the scriptures teach, expose, and correct, and then lastly they train.

D. By Training

The last way we see the Scripture change us is by training in righteousness.

Being trained in righteousness is simply being trained in how to live a right life, a life according to God’s desire and design.

This last element is really the culmination of the previous three working together.

As we are taught, as the sin in areas of our lives gets exposed, and then when we correct them by the work of

the scriptures and the spirit we are trained in righteousness.

Sports/Music Illustration

Anyone who has ever played a sport, an instrument, or been in a choir or musical has experienced this process before.

You come to practice and the coach teaches you a new skill or fundamental of the sport or music.

You give it your best effort but in reality you don't get it all quite right, so the coach or the director exposes what you are doing wrong.

This might happen one on one, or in front of everyone watching a film.

I can remember when I was in band, if our director knew there was someone playing the music wrong with the trombone part, he would make each of us play it by ourselves in front of the whole band.

But then once that wrong note or wrong movement from the sport is exposed you are then shown the correct way again.

After you do this over and over and over you become trained in that sport, on that instrument, or with your voice.

This is in many ways no different than how the word works in teaching, reproving / exposing, and correcting to lead us to a place of living according to God's desire and design.

Money Example

Just as an example this is how this process works with what the bible says about money.

You hear a sermon series, do a bible study, or in your own personal reading begin to see the Bible has lots to say about how one is supposed to spend their money.

Then as you learn and understand what the bible is saying about money you realize that what the bible says and what you do are two different things entirely.

Next, you begin to grow in understanding and obedience and start using your money in the way God designed.

This then happens over and over in all sorts of areas in your life and now you are slowly being trained in righteousness.

As this process continues throughout our lives, Paul explains the reason for this process.

That we would be equipped for every good work.

#3 God Equips His People Through His Word

The last way the Word works in us is that God equips his people through his word.

In verse 17 Paul explains the big picture purpose of this process of the word.

Yes, it is to train us in righteousness, but there is a bigger story at play here and a bigger picture to consider.

Paul shows us that our righteous life isn't an end in itself, but instead our righteous life is for God to use in every good work.

Paul is saying in verse 17 that all of verse 16 is so that the man of God can be complete, and equipped for every good work.

He equips us for two reasons: Our Good and His Glory

A. Our Good

Paul points out that being trained in righteousness is so that we might be complete.

Therefore the opposite is true, even as believers we are missing something.

We have been forgiven and positionally been made righteous before God. Our salvation is secure when our time on earth is done.

But our progressive righteous life in an unrighteous world is a lifelong process of learning, our sin being exposed, and being corrected by the scriptures through the Spirit.

And this invitation to be a part of this process is really an invitation to meet with God and be changed by Him.

When we talk about positional righteousness and progressive righteousness it allows us to say the thief on the cross is with Jesus right now because on the cross when he repented and believed in Jesus he was positionally made righteous.

But we can also say that even though the thief was right next to Jesus before he died, the senior saint who has walked with Jesus for decades and lived a life investing in the scriptures and submitting to them and meeting with God day in and day out is actually closer to the Lord than the thief was because of progressive righteousness.

It is this pursuit of progressive righteousness that draws us closer and closer to God all the day of our lives.

B. His Glory

Lastly, we see the word works in us so that we will be equipped for every good work.

Ephesians 2:10 tells us, *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

God wants us to be trained in living a life according to his desire and design so that when he gives us opportunities for good works we would walk in them.

There are good works God wants us to walk in obedience in this very week, but many of us in the room don't feel equipped for them.

We don't think we are equipped to share the gospel with someone else, to pray with someone, to offer biblical wisdom to someone in a sinful or difficult situation.

We all know there have been times in our life when God has led us to a good work to walk in but we could not because we haven't invested the time to really understand and live according to God's word.

Paul is saying that if you invest in the word and allow it to work in you, you will be equipped and ready for when those opportunities come.

Conclusion / Christ Connection

Now as we land the plane this morning we see how God's word works much like how my wife gets me to take out the trash.

How does my wife get me to take out the trash? She doesn't do charades or send a morse code. She uses her words to tell me.

She meets with me and says, can you please take out the trash.

In the same way when God wants us to do something he uses his word. He meets with us and tells us what it is we need to do.

But isn't it crazy that out of all of God's creation, when he uses his words to tell us to do something we will look to him and say no.

This is the same word that created our world. The same word that told the oceans where they needed to stay, the same word that told the mountains where they were to rise and the same word that told the sky to expand.

But when it comes to us, God calls us to good works every day with his word and we look him in the face and

say I don't have time, that will make me uncomfortable, or maybe tomorrow.

But it is only because of God's word made flesh in the person of Jesus that we could ever meet with God, be changed by God, or be equipped by God.

Jesus lived a life perfectly following all of God's words, he never rebelled against God's word.

And in his life, death, and resurrection he offers us this perfect life to replace ours if we turn to him in repentance of our sin and trust that he has done everything for us to be brought to God the Father.

Only when we have come to the perfect word of God in Jesus can the scriptures begin to work in us.

So if you have never had the word of God affect you in the ways I have talked about this morning, it might be that you have never come to the word made flesh in the person of Jesus.

For those who do follow Jesus this morning, I invite you to invest in God's Word so that you might meet with Him, be changed by Him, and be equipped by Him through His Word this morning.

Let's pray.

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Mark Dever, *Preach*.

