

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

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.

4:1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: 2 preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. 3 For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather round them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. 5 But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

Scripture is God-breathed

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Paul's letter to Timothy was written from prison in Rome, in chains, to a fellow church leader in need of encouragement. Paul knew he didn't have much longer before he was martyred for his faith and so this really is serious stuff. Timothy was, to quote Paul himself, not only young, but prone to youthful passions, and frequent ailments, and temperamentally he was timid and retiring. He had also travelled everywhere with Paul for 15 years and had effectively been mentored to take over his role. Paul's passion is for the gospel message to continue to be preached despite the fallibility of the believers involved, especially Timothy. This chapter is a pretty robust prophetic warning about the evil times and the wicked people who oppose the gospel, and the need for sound teaching of believers. As prophecy it applies equally to us now as it did in the first century. We now carry the same responsibility for the message.

What he focuses on here is the scriptures. As with many well-known bible passages, the phrase *All Scripture is God-breathed* has been interpreted in various ways according to the views of whoever is speaking. The thing is, you have to read what it says, not what you want it to say. The bible is a massive collection of different kinds of literature and so you can't apply the same rules across the board when you're wanting to see what God is saying. And He will have something to say whenever the Word is preached.

So, *All scripture*. Logically Paul here must be referring to the Old Testament and possibly early versions of the gospels, because obviously that was all that was available to him. I'm not sure he thought that what he was writing here would become authoritative scripture a few years later. But a lot of people subsequently agreed that these words were authoritative. And a lot of people would also use them to back up their own theories about the nature of the bible.

God-breathed, or inspired by God, (*inspired by God* is twice as popular as a translation but it's less accurate). The explanation of what this means to Christians varies. At one end of the spectrum you have those who say this is purely human writing but that belief in a God acted as inspiration to the authors, who then had the idea of writing accounts of their lives, or of the lives of those described. At the other end are those who feel that the text is the actual words of God basically downloaded into the writer's brain and that it's therefore all infallible and without error. And everything in between those two extremes.

The meaning of the Greek *theopneustos* is literally that the text has God's breath in it, *theo* God, *pneustos* breath. And it echoes Genesis 2:7 where God breathes life into Adam. The text is not just print on a page, but God's living word, and He speaks to us when we read it. What you have to balance this with is what Jesus says in our gospel reading this morning. At this point Jesus is speaking to the religious leaders of the Jews, defending himself from their accusations:

John 5:39 You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

Here is the thing I've found to be very true coming from a church culture where with some people the bible is given too high a priority. What Jesus says is come to **me** for eternal life and not the scriptures. The scriptures point to me, but it's me who is the source of eternal life. This transformed my view of the bible, it really did. It's true worth is that it always points to a person, the person of Jesus. Then go forward a bit and look at the point Paul is making in v: 3 *For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather round them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.*

Challenging for those people who insist that the whole of the story of the gospels is a myth. But also challenging for those Christians whose tendency is to make an idol of their traditions or in this case the bible itself. The gospel has Satan quoting scripture at Jesus and twisting its meaning. It is misused. You can always find a bible commentary which will back up your theory as to the meaning of a passage. And you can find a church or a preacher who will do the same; we like a safe message and go where we can find it. This is why we need to challenge ourselves by hearing different points of view.

And we need to look at what the text actually says and understand the context in which it was written. Then, perhaps most important, ask the Holy Spirit for interpretation for our own situation, to give us understanding. There is such a thing as truth, or as Paul describes it, sound doctrine. The whole of this chapter is Paul pointing out that there are many false teachers, but also that truth has unfortunately become a very subjective thing. The New Testament does not back up the prevalent idea today that people create their own truth. That just demeans the word truth and empties it of meaning. Look again: *scripture 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.* So when it comes down to it the message we're sent out with as Christians is the same as the message Jesus left the disciples with; this is our calling if we follow him, in Paul's words:

preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction... keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

The message of the New Testament is that there is such a thing as ultimate truth but that it does not reside in a set of ideas or even in a set of scriptures. It's a living thing and it's found in the person of Jesus himself. Amen.