



What's your final authority in life? When you're cornered, when you're in a desperate situation, when you're forced to face the most dreaded reality, where do you turn?

Before you answer too quickly, think for a minute. When it comes to establishing a standard for morality, where do you look? There has been a lot of hoopla about President Obama's speech at Notre Dame in light of his views on abortion. How do you find answers when it comes to an issue like that? When you're lost in an ethical jungle and you need to find true north, what is your compass?

Or perhaps you're about to become a parent. You want to be the best father or mother you can be for your little one. Perhaps you grew up in a home that was chaotic and broken and you missed out on some basic things a child needs. Where do you turn for wisdom on how to be the best possible parent?

Or maybe you're needing to make some very important financial decisions in the next few months. Like most people, your retirement fund has dwindled, your savings are gone, your salary has been reduced, and the creditors are beginning to call. What do you do? How do you climb out of a hole like that?

Or perhaps you're just wondering, what's the meaning of all of this? Maybe you or a friend have been through a terrible tragedy and it just seems so random. Deep down you wonder, is anyone in charge of all this? Forget the finances, you need answers to life's biggest questions. Why am I even here? Where is this whole thing headed? What's the point?

I've seen people wrestle with issues like these time and time again. I've seen some who've lost their mind, some who've lost their will, and even some who've lost their lives trying to answer these questions.

It's been my observation that people turn to one of several things in the midst of these issues. Some people turn to experts. They look for the latest bestsellers on parenting or money management or even science. Others turn to spirituality. This is a big one today. It's not about religion and dogma. That's a negative. It's all about connecting with some kind of universal consciousness that will take you to a higher plane of living. Still others simply try to escape. They might escape mentally by simply denying there is anything wrong at all or refusing to even face the hard questions. They might escape physically. They run. They get out of the marriage. They refuse to even have children. Sometimes

they escape emotionally. They check out by numbing their minds with alcohol or TV or shopping sprees.

Popular as these strategies are, they don't provide ultimate answers with lasting results. They'll leave you in moral and spiritual quicksand, more desperate and confused than at the start. So let me ask again: Where do you turn for answers?

As a follower of Jesus, the answer to that question is simple: we turn to the Word of God, the Bible. This book is a timeless, trustworthy source of truth. That's why at CPC one of our core values says: At the center of the Christian faith is the Word of God. Since God has chosen to reveal Himself through His Word, the teaching, reading, study and meditation of the Bible is essential to our relationship with Him. Every believer should be regularly fed through individual reading of the Word, small group Bible study and relevant expository preaching.

But suppose someone comes along and asks, why? This is a book written by a vast array of people over a period of several hundred years. It was written by people in cultures foreign to ours; people with no computers or cars or modern problems. How could this book possibly be relevant to me?

To answer that question turn to 2 Timothy 3. The apostle Paul wrote this letter to his young protégé, Timothy. Paul was in prison in Rome. His earthly life would soon end. Timothy was pastoring a church in Ephesus, encountering many challenges from false teachers, not the least of which was his own passive personality. At the end of chapter 3 Paul kind of takes him by the collar and says this.

**You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction (2 Timothy 3:14–4:2).**

Over and over again, Paul points Timothy to what we know of as the Bible. In v.15 he calls them the *“sacred writings.”* In v.16 it's called the *“Scripture.”* In ch. 4 he talks about the *“the word.”* In this passage Paul says three things about the Scripture which provide a foundation for why the Word of God is so dependable. He talks about the origin of Scripture, the value of Scripture and the preaching of Scripture.

## I. The Origin of Scripture

First, the origin of Scripture. He says it's inspired by God. That doesn't mean inspired like you might be inspired to write a poem or Picasso was with a painting. The Greek word translated “inspired” literally means “God-breathed.” God breathed the Scriptures into life. They came from him. Despite what liberal scholars might tell us, the Scripture comes from God. That's why we believe they're without error in the original manuscripts. How could God possibly err?

You wonder, how did God do it? Did the writer's of Scripture simply take dictation from God? Did they go into some kind of trance and God magically moved their hands to write the words? No! As a matter of fact, if you've read the Bible much at all you know the writings reflect the personality and culture of the human writers. God didn't override their personality or any of their human circumstances, but he somehow used all of that as the backdrop for giving us his word. None of them sat down and said, “I think I'll write some Scripture.” No! Rather God superintended their normal writing in such a way that what they wrote was exactly what God wanted to say.

Notice it says *“all Scripture is inspired by God.”* Not just some but all. Not just the parts that seem to speak to us or make sense to us but all of it. Perhaps you have one of those Bibles with the words of Christ in red. That might be a helpful tool but it can be deceiving if you get the idea that those words are more important than the rest of the words. What Jesus said is important, but all Scripture is inspired in just the same way.

The great thing about this is it tells us we have a God who wants to communicate with us; he wants to be in relationship with us. He hasn't left us here to figure out everything on our own. He's spoken to us in a way that's basic to our humanity—through ordinary human language we can all understand.

Many people view the Bible as a rule book. But that's not what it is. The Bible is God's revelation of reality. He wants us to know what is true and real and so in the Scripture he pulls back the curtain and he shows us. He lets us in on the answers to the great questions that have befuddled humanity since the beginning of time. Who is God? What's he like? Why are we here? What's the meaning of life? What happens when we die? What does it mean to live well? Why is there evil and suffering? Where can I find redemption? These are the questions of the ages. The

answers are in the Scripture. All we have to do is pick it up, open it, and read it.

We all need answers, don't we? Otherwise we go through life with a distorted perspective on reality. We go through life and we're like those people who enter a fun house and look at themselves in the mirror, which distorts their image. One mirror shows them at 10 feet tall and 100 pounds; another shows them as 3 feet tall and 300 pounds. It's a distortion. Unfortunately, that's how most people view life. Left to ourselves, that's how we all view it. But the Scripture corrects all the distortions and it lets us see ourselves and our world as it really is.

## II. The Value of Scripture

This brings me to the second affirmation Paul makes about the Scripture. He talks about its value. He says it's *“profitable.”* That means it's useful; it helps us live life in the most effective and meaningful way possible. Up in v.15 Paul said, *“the sacred writings...are able to lead you to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”* That's a big reason why they're profitable! They point us to a Savior, Jesus.

Last week I drove my daughter home from Spokane, WA. That's a long drive so we did it in two days. I used the map function on my phone and it helped me find my way. But the weird thing was there were times it told me to take a certain highway east. If you know where Spokane is you know east will take you in the opposite direction of the Bay Area. So following this thing was kind of counter intuitive at times. But I had to trust it. Sometimes you have to go east to get to the highway that will take you west. Sometimes the Bible tells us to do some things that seem counter intuitive as well. The Bible says you have die to live. Jesus said if you want to save your life you have to lose your life. That's counter intuitive. But we have to trust it. It's profitable. If we follow its lead, it will get us home.

He says specifically that it's profitable for *“teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness.”* We need all four of those things. We need teaching or what we call doctrine. We need to know the facts about God, man, Jesus and salvation. Don't ever fall into the trap of thinking that doctrine is boring and impractical. R.C. Sproul says, “Doctrine is life!” What we believe about these things trickles down into our lifestyle. For example, I believe in the providence of God, the teaching that says the world and humanity are not ruled by chance or by fate, but rather by a God who directs history and creation towards an ultimate goal. That means what happens to me is under God's control. That doctrine is life for me. It allows me to trust God in the midst of whatever I have to go through, even tragedy. That's what allowed Joseph to say to his brothers, *“You meant it for evil but God meant it for good...”*

But then he also mentions reproof. Reproof means pointing out something that's wrong. It carries the idea of rebuking. This

includes reproof in our doctrine. It's important to be able to discern truth from error. False teaching has to be exposed for what it is. But it also includes reproof for how we live. Anyone who has walked with the Lord for any length of time has had the experience of being rebuked by something you read in the Bible. The Bible says, *"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth..."* How can you read that without being rebuked? That's why when we drift away from the Lord the last thing we want to do is read the Bible. It's too painful!

Next, he mentions correction. Here is the positive side. The Bible not only rebukes us, it also restores us. Correction is the restoration of something to its original purpose. In Greek literally this word was used of putting a person who stumbles back on his feet. Scripture not only tells us what we're doing wrong but how to make it right. Paul wrote, *"Let him who steals steal no longer."* That's reproof. But then he says, *"but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good"* (Eph 4:28). That's correction. "Instead of that, do this."

Finally, he says it's valuable for *"training in righteousness."* People today hire personal trainers who teach you how to work out and keep you accountable. The goal of their training is physical health and conditioning. Scripture is like a personal trainer, but the goal isn't physical conditioning, it's spiritual conditioning. The Bible trains us to live righteously. But just as with a personal trainer we need discipline. He can't do it for us. This ought to be an encouragement to us to practice discipline in our own reading and study of Scripture. Many of us put a lot of time into eating right and exercising enough. In Paul's letter to Timothy he said, *"bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things"* (1Tim 4:8). Do you work as hard at Scripture as you do at your physical health?

This has particular application to those called to preach and teach the Word of God. That's what Paul is referring to when he says, *"so that the man of God may be adequate, fully equipped for every good work."* That term "the man of God" is a technical term. In the Old Testament it's used of men like Moses, David and Elijah. Here it refers to those like Timothy with responsibility in the church to teach and preach. The Bible makes us adequate and equipped. Imagine a plumber without any tools. Of course, it costs money just to have a plumber show up. But what if he came to your house without any tools? You show him the problem, but he's going to be useless. You end up with a \$70 bill and your sink is still clogged. That's no good. But that's a pastor without a Bible. You pay him but for what? He's useless. He's not equipped.

### III. The preaching of Scripture

Now this naturally leads to the third thing he addresses with Timothy—the preaching of Scripture. This is what pastors are supposed to do with the Bible. The command is found in the first three words of v. 2, *"Preach the word."* Look at how important

this is: *"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God..."* He says, "Don't miss this! You'll be held accountable for this before God who will judge you. Preach the Word!"

In this letter Paul has already told Timothy to believe the word, to study the word and to live the word, but that's not enough. He's also to preach the word. Timothy was one of those guys who would have been very content to just stay in his study and forget about the preaching part. Honestly, there have been many times when I wished I could just stay in my study, and read and think and write, maybe meet with a few people over coffee and chat about it. But it's the preaching part, week after week, that gives me headaches and heartaches. Headaches because it's just hard mental work. Heartaches because I know how seldom I live up to my own preaching. I think that was true for Timothy, and so Paul charges him, "Preach the word."

What is preaching? The word "preach" (kerusso) means "to proclaim as a herald." A herald in that day was a like a town crier who made an announcement in the full light of day to the sound of a trumpet. It was usually an urgent message from the King himself. It wasn't a detached, theoretical discourse but a relevant proclamation demanding a response. J.I. Packer says, "Christian preaching is the event of God bringing to a congregation a bible based, Christ related, life impacting message of instruction and direction from (God) himself through the words of a spokesman." That's not everybody's job, but it's the job of every pastor. And it's through preaching the word that the people of a church grow up in their faith and are equipped to use their God-given spiritual gifts.

Notice he says *"Preach the word."* The job of a pastor isn't to preach his own word, but God's word. The issue is not what I want to say, but what God has already said. We're not to be the inventor of anything, but to communicate what's already been spoken. The focus is the word, not ourselves. I'm not up here to disclose my deepest feelings or tell my own story. Those things might shed light on the word, but the focus is the word. That's why we have a commitment here at CPC to what we call expository preaching. Expository preaching is preaching which explains and applies a text of Scripture. Some expository preaching takes a single text within a book of the Bible like I'm doing today. At other times we work through an entire book paragraph by paragraph. The advantage of doing that is it gives us truth in balance. The preacher doesn't have the luxury of selecting his own subject matter. He's forced to deal with the topics that naturally emerge from the text.

There is a dearth of expository preaching in America today. The very validity of preaching is being attacked today. The idea is to have lots of singing, a testimony, a video, and maybe a 15 minute interactive sermon to top it off. More and more churches believe that preaching should take a secondary role because people

today are so media saturated that they need more than just the spoken word. How many of you can even remember what I preached four weeks ago?

Several years ago, *The British Weekly* published this letter:

Dear Sir:

It seems ministers feel their sermons are very important and spend a great deal of time preparing them. I have been attending church quite regularly for 30 years, and I have probably heard 3,000 of them. To my consternation, I discovered I cannot remember a single sermon. I wonder if a minister's time might be more profitably spent on something else?

For weeks a storm of editorial responses ensued, finally ended by this letter:

Dear Sir:

I have been married for 30 years. During that time I have eaten 32,850 meals - mostly my wife's cooking. Suddenly I have discovered I cannot remember the menu of a single meal. And yet, I have the distinct impression that without them, I would have starved to death long ago.

I don't have illusions about you remembering all my sermons. But I do want to give you enough food to get you through the week and keep you spiritually healthy. Hopefully, when you come to church you will always get a well-prepared, balanced meal from the word of God rather than a watered down little chat with a verse at the end.

## CONCLUSION

Let me close today with some practical help for you. I've been talking about preaching but most of you are usually on the other end of that. You're not the ones doing the preaching, you're the ones being preached to. Have you ever listened to a sermon that tells you how to listen to a sermon? Let me do that.

First of all, start preparing the night before. It's interesting that for the Jews the Sabbath started on Friday evening. If you're going to really be ready to hear the word of God on Sunday morning, doesn't it make sense to prepare? Doesn't it make sense to get enough sleep? Doesn't it make sense to go on the web site and find out what the passage will be and read it? Doesn't it make sense to pray for the preacher and yourself?

Second, discipline yourself to stay alert during the sermon. That starts with bringing your Bible. I love to hear the rustle of pages as you all turn to the passage being preached. It also helps to have a pencil in hand so you can take notes. That will help you

stay engaged. Consider this: listening is part of your worship; do it well. When your mind wanders, and it will, pull it back like you would a straying child about to wander from the sidewalk into the street. Beware of distractions. This is why we try to keep distractions to a minimum. This is why we ask parents with babies to use the nursery or sit in the back so they can move into the lobby if their baby gets fussy. It's not that we don't like babies. But we want to do everything possible to minimize distractions while the word of God is being preached. This is why we want you to leave your cell phone in your car. If God were up here talking, would you be texting?

Third, ask critical questions. Don't be afraid. Ask yourself, is this biblical? Is he teaching me what this passage really means and how it applies to my life? What is still unclear to me? What is the main point? The Bible says, concerning the Bereans whom Paul met on his second missionary journey, "*they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.*" (Acts 17:11). We might have expected the Bereans to be criticized for daring to scrutinize the teaching of the apostle Paul. But they were commended for examining his teaching to see if it was biblical.

Fourth, find one thing to **do** in response to the sermon and do it. We should be itching to put what we learn into practice. Is there a promise to believe? A sin to avoid? A virtue to cultivate? A goal to pursue? A good work to perform? There is always something God wants us to do in response to the preaching of his Word. We're called to be "*doers of the word, and not hearers only*" (James 1:22). And if we are not doers, then we were not hearers, and the sermon was wasted on us.

Finally, find a way to revisit the sermon. It might be later that day; it might be later in the week. Talk about it with your friends or family. Pray about it. Go to our web site and download it and listen to it again. We even have some small groups here that revisit the sermon for the Bible study portion of the meeting.

Listening takes a prepared soul, an alert mind, an open Bible, and a receptive heart. But the best way to tell if we're listening is by the way we live. Our lives should repeat the sermons that we've heard. I leave you with what Paul wrote to some of the people who listened to his sermons, "*You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you're a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.*" (2 Cor. 3:2-3 NIV).

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