

An Important Text on the Inspiration and Sufficiency of Scripture

2 Timothy 3:16-17

2 Timothy 3:16-17: *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

Background Notes

2 Timothy was a personal letter from the apostle Paul to Timothy, his younger fellow worker. Paul was now in prison in Rome, and Timothy was in Ephesus, where he was involved in building up the church that had been founded during Paul's third missionary journey. Throughout the epistle Paul urged Timothy to be faithful to the Lord and to be committed to the faith, even though the Roman persecutions of Christians had already begun, and some within the church were departing from the faith.

In 2 Timothy 3:14-15 Paul reminded Timothy about the importance of Scripture, and the crucial role that the Scriptures had played in Timothy's salvation. Now in verses 16-17 Paul emphasized the importance of the Scriptures for Timothy's present ministry. The Scriptures were God's revelation to mankind, and God's Word was crucial for equipping Timothy (and every Christian, then and today) for the work of the Lord.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Bible is 100% inspired by God.

Verse 16: *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God.”*

What does that mean? Does that mean that when you read the Bible, you'll be “inspired” to serve the Lord more faithfully? That may be the result, but that's not the meaning of “inspiration” in this verse. It's great when you read the Bible and get fired up to serve the Lord more faithfully - but that's not what “inspired” means here! Does it mean that the writers of Scripture were inspired - like an artist who paints a beautiful sunset, or a pianist who composes a wonderful piece of music? No, that's not what's meant in this verse.

Here's a brief definition of inspiration: *Inspiration may be defined as the process by which God superintended the writers and the writings of Scripture, so that only what God intended was written down.*

The word “inspired” here literally means “God breathed” - breathed by God, just as if God was speaking. Even though the Bible was written by many different men who came from many different walks of life and different educational backgrounds, yet God so *controlled* and *superintended* the writing of Scripture that when we come to the Bible, we can read it as if it’s coming straight from the mouth of God. That’s the view of Scripture that our Lord Jesus had. In Matthew 4:4 and Luke 4:4 He said, “*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.*”

The correct view of Scripture is that it *originated in the **mind of God*** and was *communicated as if from the **mouth of God***. 2 Peter 1:21 says of the writers of Scripture: “*Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*” The Bible is not man’s word about God. It is God’s Word to man.

Someone might say, “Well, if the Bible is God’s Word, why does it sound so ‘human’?” For example, anyone can tell the difference between Paul’s writing and Isaiah’s writing. Yes, that’s true, because different human authors wrote the Bible, and God used the historical and cultural backgrounds of each human author of Scripture. But God controlled their writings to the point that the human writers only wrote the words that God wanted them to write. We’re not talking here about mechanical dictation, but rather about supernatural control.

Here’s a helpful illustration. In my hand I’m holding three writing instruments – a pencil, a ballpoint pen, and a felt tip pen. If I wrote you a note with anyone of these instruments, you’d be able to tell immediately whether it was written with a pencil, or the ballpoint pen, or the felt tip pen. The writing would have all the characteristics of that instrument. But here’s the point: I’m *controlling the instrument*. I’m superintending the writing, even to the very words that go down on the paper.

Do you see the point of the illustration? Let’s say the pencil represents Moses. The ballpoint pen represents Isaiah. The felt tip pen represents the apostle Paul. God picked up each instrument in the author’s own time, and He used Moses, and He used Isaiah, and He used Paul to write Scripture. Each writer maintained his distinctive historical and cultural and human characteristics - but God superintended what was written down on the parchments.

God’s control extended to the very **words** - not just the concepts and ideas and thoughts, but right down to the words of Hebrew for the Old Testament and Greek for the New Testament. 1 Corinthians 2:13 says, “*These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches.*”

The Bible is verbally inspired by God. God superintended and controlled every word used in Scripture. Therefore ***the Bible is inerrant.*** It does not make mistakes. It is the breathed-out word of God to mankind. The Bible is 100% inspired by God.

2. The Bible is 100% sufficient for man.

Verses 16-17: *"...and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

The Bible is sufficient for all that the believer needs, so that he or she will be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work. Do you need doctrine or teaching? All necessary doctrine is found in the Bible. Do you need reproof for a wrong you've done or a sin that you've committed? Read the Bible and you'll be convicted. I was just talking to a student yesterday about an area of life where the Holy Spirit is convicting him – and that conviction came about through his study of the Bible.

Do you need correction? The Bible not only convicts us of our sin - it also shows us what we need to do to make things right again. Do you need instruction in righteousness? The Bible educates us about what pleases God, and it also disciplines us. The Bible is 100% sufficient for man.

A few summers ago at a Christian camp, I taught a seminar for the high school and college group entitled "Itches and Scratches." The idea was that the campers could ask any question they wanted - any question they felt was important for their lives as believers. Wherever they had an "itch," they would ask a question. Then I would try to find an answer for them in the Bible. We would let the Bible "scratch" where they "itched." They wrote their questions on 3x5 cards and put them in the "itch/scratch" box, and then I had a day to find answers from the Bible. And guess what? The Bible had an answer for every question that they asked! Sometimes the answer was specific, and sometimes the answer was more general, but the Bible had answers for all the itches.

The Bible has answers for all the questions and needs of life. The Bible is 100% sufficient for man.

Practical Applications

1. Have you read the entire Bible yet?

How many of you here have read the entire Bible at least once? Here's the point. If the Bible is 100% sufficient to thoroughly equip us for every good work, it stands to reason that we should at least read the whole Bible. Doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness – these teachings are not just limited to the Bible stories, or the most familiar passages of Scripture, or our favorite verses and texts. No, important instruction comes from *all* of Scripture. We need to be familiar with the entire Bible.

Reading through the Bible in a year is a great program. When our son was a pre-teen, I challenged him to read through the Bible in a year. He said he'd do it if I did it. That's a lot of work! You have to work hard and stay on schedule to read through the whole Bible in a year – but we did it! In fact, he read through the Bible twice before he was twelve years old!

It's a good idea to challenge your own children to do that. Reading through the Bible in a year may not be your style, but you need to have some program so that you get to read the whole Bible.

Not too long ago I met a woman who had read through the Bible more than fifty times - and she wasn't all that old either. She really knew the Bible! She knew how to find Scriptures that applied to all areas and questions of life. Have you read the whole Bible yet?

2. How are your “grades” in P.E.?

In this title, P.E. does not mean physical education – it stands for “**Prepared**” and “**Equipped**.” 2 Timothy 2:21 speaks of a Christian who is like a clean vessel that is prepared for the Master's use: “*a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.*” The prepared vessel must be clean and readily available. It must be properly prepared and equipped, and therefore can be used for whatever the Master needs.

The Bible is our training manual. It will prepare and equip the “servant of God.” This verse is saying that the Word of God will equip **any** believer who wants to be a man or woman of God to be ready and available for every good work.

For example, you don't have to have an advanced degree and professional training to be a Christian counselor. Those things may help, but if you know the Word of God - if you have a thorough working knowledge of the Bible - you are prepared and equipped to be a Christian counselor!

How are your grades in P.E.? Are you *Prepared* as a clean vessel? Are you *Equipped* with the knowledge of the Word of God?

How are your “grades” in P.E.?