

"All Scripture Is Inspired, Part 1"

October 19, 2025

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Today is part one of a three-part sermon series which revolves around a single Bible verse. That verse is 2 Timothy 3:16 which says, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness." This is one troublesome verse, because it tends to be interpreted in extremes. Some read "all Scripture is inspired by God" and understand "inspired by God" to mean dictated by God. And if God dictated it, that means every individual verse of the Bible is eternal truth that can be used "for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness. And I have to admit that sounds great and holy and honorable and I really like it, until you actually read the Bible, then the premise falls apart. An obvious example: Isaiah 2:4,

"He shall judge between the nations
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation;
neither shall they learn war any more."

Now Joel 3:9-10,

"Proclaim this among the nations:
Consecrate yourselves for war;
stir up the warriors...
Beat your plowshares into swords
and your pruning hooks into spears;
let the weakling say, "I am a warrior."

It would be impossible for two passages to say more opposite things. One says beat your swords into plowshares and your spears into pruning hooks, while the other says beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Now when you put these passages into their Biblical context, they both work. One is a prophecy of when God comes to rule the earth. It says when God comes to rule and take control, then we "can beat our swords into plowshare and our spears into pruning hooks" and will not have to learn war anymore because God will take care of it all. What a glorious day that will be. But that day is not today, and the prophet Joel has a vision for the interim. If the people will cast off their sin and follow the ways of God, not only will the draught end and food become plentiful, but God will make all of Judea's enemies fall down before them. Judah's army will be victorious over every enemy. So do not fear. First cast off your sinful behavior and clothe yourselves with righteousness. Then "Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears." You will no longer be a conquered people, ruled by fear. God will bring the victory. In their Biblical context, these two

passages are God's word to God's people, but the extreme idea that every verse is inspired or dictated for all time and can therefore be lifted out of its context and applied to any situation – well it just doesn't work.

The other extreme interpretation of this verse isn't any better. It starts with recognizing that when 2 Timothy was written, the New Testament had not yet been compiled or defined as Scripture, which is true. The New Testament would not be compiled and defined as Scripture of hundreds of years yet. What that means is when the author says "all Scripture is inspired", he is referring to what we call the Old Testament. Think about that for a moment. If the New Testament doesn't exist yet, and only the Old Testament was "inspired" Scripture, that means: 1. Our Bible's stories of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection as well the stories of the early church are not in the inspired category, and 2. this passage is not in its understanding of Scripture and therefore any discussion about it is irrelevant. Of course that argument is easily countered with the affirmation that all Scripture is inspired by God. Just because the New Testament authors didn't know they were writing Scripture doesn't mean the God who inspired it didn't know it would become Scripture. So what I am saying is neither extreme interpretation of this passage is helpful. Individual verses cannot be taken out of their Biblical context and still be used as the inspired word of God, "useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness." We call that proof texting and is generally done to use the Bible to support an individual's perspective, as opposed to allowing the individual to be shaped by the Bible's perspective. It tends to be more self-serving than God serving, and therefore can be dangerous. On the other hand, pretending that the author's knowledge, intent and context is the end-all of interpretation without leaving room for God in the writing or the interpretation removes the whole concept of inspiration from the Christian Scriptures.

Let me propose a different understanding here. Now this is just a Mike thing. I can't quote a whole bunch of great theologians because that is not where I am coming from. This is a Mike thing. What if the key word in this passage from 2 Timothy is "all". All the Scriptures together, when they are held together, is where inspiration is. The reality is the Bible was written by preachers – inspired by God, but written by preachers. And a preacher's job is to take the holy, eternal, inspired word of God and make it applicable to their time and place. The Gospel of John just admits it. Chapter 20 ends with the reason John wrote his Gospel. He says, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may (come to or) continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in His name." John says there were other stories, other signs, other teachings of Jesus that he did not include because they didn't fit with his purpose. So if we are reading a preacher's sermon from another time and place, we need to figure out what is the inspired word of God, and what is the preacher's application to their time and place. Then we can take the inspiration – the inspired part – and apply it to our time and place.

Let me boil this down to the essence of what I am saying and I will be done for today. The Bible is inspired by God but written by people. The only part of the Bible that the Bible says is written by God is the 10 Commandments. The rest of it is inspired by God but written by people. And what that means for us as Bible people who look to the Bible seeking God's word for us in our time, is we need to do the hard work of finding what is God's inspired word – that eternal truth that does not change through time and situations – and what is the preacher/writer's application of that truth for their time and place. Reality, we all pick and choose what parts of the Bible we think are eternal truth and what parts were confined to their original time and place. We all do. Personally, when Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell all that he had and give it to the poor, that was a specific time and place thing that only applied to him, not me. I don't want to sell everything I have and give it to the poor. But when 1 Corinthians 9:14 says, "The Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel," that one is not just their time but ours too. That is your cue to giggle. We all pick and choose what parts of the Bible we think are eternal truth and what parts were confined to their original time and place. Through the next couple of weeks, I hope to explore with you some faithful ways of doing it. Because "that is how I feel" or "that is what I had heard" are not faithful Bible interpretation standards. Faithful Bible interpretation is about holding the entire inspired word together and letting it push against itself until the eternal truth comes out.

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