

“The Authority of the Bible”

2 Timothy 3v14-4v4

Why should we listen to what the Bible says? We've heard it read, sung parts of it... but in 2007 isn't it time to accept that the Bible is a relic that's best left in the past? It might be the all time bestseller but shouldn't we just let it collect dust on our bookshelves...

One newspaper recently said “*The Bible is about love and tolerance*” - which ought to make it very popular in our day and age... Another said: “*Thankfully society as a whole has realised that the Bible is not the literal word of God and believes that the bigotry and intolerance within its pages is unacceptable*”.

And don't we say the same? I don't like what the Bible says, so I won't listen to it. Or more subtly we have the parts we love, and other parts we overlook.

What I think of the Bible isn't the issue – the key question is, what does it say about itself. And this is what it says about itself: **3v16** “*All scripture is God-breathed*”. God-breathed. That's a strange phrase! What does it mean? It means that *what the Bible says, God says*.

How so? Words come on our breath. To say scripture is *God-breathed* is to say it comes from the mouth of God. Not by dictation but by human authors, like Paul who we see in **1v1** wrote this letter to Timothy – written by men, breathed out by God.

3v16 only explicitly refers to the Old Testament, the scripture Timothy grew up with. But the rest of the New Testament shows itself to be scripture too. And so we're to take all 66 books as scripture, and **all** scripture is God speaking.

When God speaks it's always significant. He doesn't waste words. He spoke into the darkness – *let – there – be – light*. And there was light! When God speaks universes get created. And it was good, good, good, good, good and very good. His word gets things done.

No-one can be divided from their words. *Like him or not, George Bush, probably the most powerful person in the world. His word has authority to wield nuclear weapons and economic influence.*

On a much greater scale God's word, in this book, carries the full weight of God's authority. They represent him. But what is his word about?

1. **The Saving Word.**
2. **The Judging Word.**

1. The Saving Word

Look at **3v14**, this powerful authoritative word of God came to Timothy, through the tenderness, weakness and gentle patience of his mother Eunice (**1v5**). The universe creating word from parent to child...

- From the scriptures, **v14**, Timothy **learned**.
- From the scriptures, **v14** he was **convinced**.

About salvation: **3v15**. Of “*salvation – through faith – in Christ Jesus*”. A weighty word from God's mouth, from Eunice to her son Timothy. *A privilege and opportunity for those who are parents to teach their children God's word...*

By his word the LORD stakes his claim on our lives as he publishes his good news (1v8), advertising his purpose and grace (1v9), announcing the abolition of death and the start of eternal life (1v10).

The Bible is God's book of good news, about Jesus. Marcus Honeysett comments:

**“There is one God,
with one plan of salvation
through the one man Jesus Christ,
that he tells us about in one book
and illuminates by one Spirit”**

We shouldn't be surprised. God saves through his word – delivered to Timothy by his mother. God leading Timothy to God. Human ideas and innovation don't change the world – only God's powerful word does, carrying God's authority.

All the scriptures publishing God's saving word... From Genesis to Revelation, in law and history, songs and prophecy, biography and letters. All packed with the good news that Jesus Christ is our Saviour!

And, notice - **3v16-17** – it's just what gets us started with God... The Bible is not just for Christmas, it's for life: **3v16-17**...

“...useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Our creator speaks with authority in his word. Not mystically but through his word that teaches and corrects us. We need it!

But, personal Bible study doesn't always feel great. It doesn't always feel like *the universe-creating authoritative word of God*. It can seem difficult, even dull, or just overwhelming as we don't know where to begin... We may not have even opened a Bible for many days, or weeks. Sometimes because of the pressures of life, sometimes in carelessness. It happens. And the point here isn't to feel guilty about that.

It's not a sin if we don't read the Bible every day. But – this is God's authoritative word. This is the food we need and if we're neglecting it we'll find ourselves in trouble. God has given us these pages and books for our benefit.

Sometimes it's difficult, but it will yield to “faith-filled” study. When we're struggling, let's help one another. On reflection one of the reasons I didn't do well at University was that I was too proud to ask for help... *Let's share our discoveries and difficulties together.*

Let's get God's saving word into our busy lives. Prayerfully asking questions of the author as we read it. *Lord, what are you saying here? What does this mean? How must I change?* God stakes his claim on our lives as he teaches us about our Saviour Jesus Christ in his word.

2. The Judging Word

Jesus is our Saviour, **v15**, but also **4v1**: Judge. God's word is life to those who accept it, but the stench of death to those who reject it. Paul charges Timothy, **4v2** - **“Preach – the – word”**, **4v2**. Cry out to all the people - *“Hear ye, hear ye... Jesus is Saviour, and Judge!”* Announcing the claim of Jesus on people.

You'd think that since all the people need a Saviour, that all the people would embrace this good news... who wouldn't want eternal life with Jesus? But, **4v3**... people do not and will not put up with sound doctrine, which means *“healthy teaching”*. We don't know what's good for us and we don't want what's good for us...

That's where everything went wrong in the first place - It wasn't *eating fruit* that got Adam and Eve in trouble – the problem was they stood over God's word. They judged it – thinking they knew better.

It was the same with **King Ahab** of Israel. He gathered around himself 400 prophets who would tell him whatever he wanted to hear. Four-hundred yes-men, to feed his ego and drown out God's word...

There was one true prophet who spoke from God. And Ahab said
"I hate him because he never says anything good about me, only bad".

Can we do that with a bank statement we don't like? Or a medical report? *Like* isn't the point.

So, God judged Ahab.
Not as a man who hated God's word,
but as a man who hated God.
God will not be divided from His word...

We can be the same, and without 400 friends. I read the Bible and see clearly the Word of God saying *"be humble"*. But I prefer the Word of Dave – which says *"be proud!"*. Following the Word of Dave means rejecting the Word of God.

But, since *what the Bible says, God says* then I'm disobeying God by disobeying his word... preferring, **4v3**, to serve my itching ears instead of my glorious God. Praying *"my kingdom come, my will be done..."*

A man visited the Louvre in Paris, and took a look at the Mona Lisa. He examined it from several angles, before turning to the security guard and saying:
"I don't like it".
The guard replied:
"Sir, these paintings are no longer being judged, the viewers are".

So too for God's word. It stands, the saving word. If we listen to it, we find life in Jesus. But if we stand over it, judging it - then it judges us, God judges us by His word.

We won't always like what God's word says – because of that we need to pray that our hearts are changed, and we need to hear God's word preached. To be confronted with it.

That's why the constitution of our church says this:

“the visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached....

The preaching isn't meant to be *“the boring bit”* of our meeting – it's the time get refreshed, as the good news of Jesus Christ is heralded in our hearing.

Piers, Ian, Steve and myself are committed to **preaching the word** week by week. Not to just pick out what we want to say, or what we might want to hear...

If we're prepared to listen, God's word will sound glorious to us. So too our response in songs and liturgy, filling the air with the aroma of Jesus. *If we pick and choose, accepting only what we want then it'll sound worse than fingernails on a blackboard, to our itching ears.*

This is not a year to leave the Bible to collect dust. It's a time to open it up. With the Bible open we will find ourselves examined by God. He'll ask us whether we're going to judge his word, like Adam and Eve and Ahab....

He'll ask us if we'll take him at his word. And if we will, if we'll accept what he says then we'll find life. We'll find *salvation - through faith - in Christ Jesus.*