



Holy Scripture

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

I want us to consider the doctrine of Holy Scripture in this article. I do so for it is of great and vital importance and something of which we need to be reminded regularly. A solid understanding of the doctrine of Scripture is essential for a faithful and fruitful walk with God - individually and collectively for the church. Recently I read Mark Dever's little book *What is a Healthy Church?* The essential marks he notes are: expository preaching; biblical theology; a biblical understanding of the good news; a biblical understanding of conversion; a biblical understanding of evangelism; a biblical understanding of membership; biblical church discipline; biblical discipleship and growth; biblical church leadership. In other words Pastor Dever correctly reminds us that the health of the church and those who comprise her is dependent on our right understanding and application of the word of God!

Most of the problems we experience individually and collectively in the church are the result of our foolish neglect of or disobedience to God's inspired, infallible and inerrant word. How often are we told today that doctrine and theology are the greatest barriers to health and harmony in the church! And yet Scripture says the opposite is the case! It is the absence of and disobedience to biblical doctrine and theology that is the cause of the deep-seated malaise and disharmony which mars the church's witness. Faithfulness leads to fruitfulness. We must abide in the doctrine of Christ or we are not His. He is both the subject and the object of Holy Scripture.

We must 'Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.'
(2 Timothy 1:13)

Origin and nature of Scripture

Let us therefore first of all consider the origin and nature of Holy Scripture: All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. All! Not just some Scripture but all, i.e. the 39 books that comprise the Old Testament plus the 27 that make up the New Testament. These 66 books that are contained in the Holy Bible, and these alone, are given by inspiration. This immediately provokes the question, are we reading, meditating upon and applying God's word in our lives? As a minister I am called upon to preach the whole counsel of God. Yes, there is such a thing as progressive revelation but we impoverish ourselves if we restrict our diet to the New Testament. Just as we require a balanced diet for good physical health so we also require a balanced diet of Old as well as New Testament Scripture to ensure a healthy walk with God.

Inspiration

Let us be aware that the Greek word *theopneustos* which is translated by the English word 'inspiration', could be misconstrued by some. We often say such and such a person was inspired to write a poem or song! We often claim to have found inspiration, when what we really mean is that we have had an idea! That is not what is meant by the word inspiration in Scripture. Instead the original Greek conveys the meaning that Scripture is God-given, it is out-breathed by God. The NIV captures the sense best when it says that '*All Scripture is God-breathed*'. All Scripture is uniquely

given by God - it is special revelation from the One who is infinitely wise and perfect in all His ways.

'Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.'
(2 Peter 1:20-21)

There is a common refrain running throughout Scripture - we read time after time: *'Thus saith the Lord!'*

Let us acknowledge that without the light of God's word man must ever remain in darkness. That is why the Psalmist says: *'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path'* (Psalm 119:105). There is no pilgrim's progress without it! We cannot walk in the light without it! We cannot walk by faith without it! We cannot walk in love without it! We cannot walk the narrow road without it! We cannot look unto Jesus without it! We cannot follow Him without it! Let us truly acknowledge that all Scripture is given by God and is therefore fully trustworthy and must be believed and obeyed.

The evidence of its God-given status is irrefutable. Both Old and New Testament writers understood it to be the word of the living God as did the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Consider the pinpoint accuracy of Scripture in the fulfilment of prophecy, particularly relating to the birth, life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus - the mathematical probabilities of these being mere coincidence are impossible. It alone reveals the way of salvation - a way which is beyond man's imagination and wherewithal. Consider the witness of the church - of countless lives transformed by believing and applying this word.

The authority of Scripture

Let us secondly recognise the authority of Holy Scripture: Because of its origins and nature it is wholly authoritative. It is the word of the one, true and living God: we are to read it and heed it. It is given by our Maker and Redeemer. We often refer to the canon of Scripture. The word canon means rule - it is a perfect rule in all matters pertaining to faith and practice. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* says:

'The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.'

'For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.' (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

The authority and truthfulness of Holy Scripture is therefore not dependent upon the church but instead the church is wholly dependent upon the word of God - the church is made up of all those who are begotten again by the word of truth. Moreover neither must we allow experience to take precedence over the word of God but our experiences must be measured and judged in the light of God's word. The word of God, not personal inclinations, feelings, ideas or notions must carry ultimate and supreme authority in our lives. The word of God, not tradition or what is expedient to the climate and culture of our day, must be our rule and guide. We can have 'churchianity' but we cannot have true Christianity without the faithful preaching, teaching and application of Scripture. It is only in and through the Scriptures that God reveals Himself and all that we need to know, believe and practice if we are to glorify Him.

'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.'
(Isaiah 8:20)

'Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.'
(1 John 4:1)

Sufficiency of Scripture

Let us thirdly consider the sufficiency of Holy Scripture. The *Westminster Confession* again rightfully notes:

'The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.'

Nothing is to be added; nothing is to be taken away! Many sadly would recognise the origin and nature of Holy Scripture but would refute its sufficiency. They add to the teaching of Scripture. They would teach Scripture PLUS tradition or new revelations or some such thing. Why? God's word not only makes us wise unto salvation which is through faith in Christ Jesus but it is given *'That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works'*. There are others of course who tragically claim to be Christians and yet they take away from the revelation of Scripture. They refuse to believe and practice the truth that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. They would have us discard anything that cannot be explained by so called natural means. Hence they refute the virgin birth, the nature of our Lords atoning sacrifice, His physical, literal resurrection and ascension and so many other vital truths. They would have us believe that Scripture is not God-given but that men were inspired in their search for God to write these little stories! God has issued a grave warning to those who would add to or take away from Holy Scripture:

'For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.'
(Revelations 22:18-19)

Let us rest assured in both the authority and the sufficiency of Holy Scripture.

Purpose of Scripture

Let us finally consider the purpose of Holy Scripture:

'All scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works'.

We need to understand that God has given His word to His people, the church. It should not surprise us that the world often ridicules and scorns God's word. The Scriptures are foolishness to the natural man (1 Corinthians 2:14). And yet the world desperately needs to hear the message of Scripture for unless fallen man believes and heeds Gods word he will be condemned by it. The Holy Spirit, however, must indwell man and cast His light upon Scripture before he can read and hear aright and act on it.

'The Scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.'
(2 Timothy 3:15)

That is why we read in John: *'These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.'*
(John 20:31)

It is through the preaching of the word that God has chosen to save them that believe. This is the way that God has chosen to save His people: *'Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth'* (James 1:18). That is why we must always preach a crucified and risen Saviour and Lord.

'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.'
(Ephesians 1:13)

Moreover the Scriptures contain all things necessary for us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. Thus they are profitable for doctrine: yes, theology. The early church gave themselves first and foremost to the apostles' doctrine, for right thinking must precede and lead to right acting. The Scriptures reprove and correct us. They reveal our sin - not only our sins of commission but also our sins of omission. However they do not leave us there but they wonderfully correct. Our thoughts, words and deeds are to conform to God's standards. Hence we need to be constantly heeding and applying God's word. We are to be *semper reformanda* - always reforming in the light of the word of God. Just as a train cannot run without tracks, the Christian cannot function as God intends if he is not making faithful application of the word of truth. For this word provides instruction in righteousness - imputed and actual for we are being conformed to the image of Christ. We are to be holy as God is holy. We are not holy by nature but by grace and nurture on the basis of reading and heeding the word of the living God we are to show that we are truly members of the family of God; that we are new creatures, born from above and being prepared for glory. Let us read and heed the word of God.

Permit me to conclude by way of citing a quotation that was found printed inside a copy of the Geneva Bible published in post-Reformation Scotland. The Bible, it rightly reminds us, contains:

'the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrine is holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be saved, and practise it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveller's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter. Here heaven is open, and the gates of hell are disclosed. Christ is the grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, health to the soul, and a river of pleasure. It is given to you here in this life, will be opened at the judgment, and is established forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labour, and condemn all who trifle with its contents.'

Will you say Amen to this?

W Pearce

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