

“Scripture Alone is the Standard”

2 Timothy 3:16, 17

prepared by **Scotty Neasbitt**

for

Northwest Hills Community Church

October 12, 2008

If you've been following the news lately – nevermind the news, if you've been following your stock portfolios or your bank statements, you'll know that the things this world values most are tumbling evermore downward. Not only is the stock market sliding into the abyss with record declines day in and day out, but entire institutions – once thought to be relatively strong and stable – are crumbling before our very eyes. Governments the world over are scrambling to shore up, bailout, and otherwise rescue these institutions because they realize that properly functioning institutions are critical to society's stability and progress. We find ourselves witness to our own government having to choose between the proverbial lesser of two evils to bring about a relative calm to the markets and the banks and the rest of the financial sector so that the decline's cascading effect affects as few as possible.

The world's institutions have a habit of dying over time. By design, none of our man-made institutions lasts forever, which reminds me of something Rick Warren wrote about the church recently on his blog. Listen to this and begin to contemplate the contrast between the institutions of this world and the redeemed Bride of Christ, the Church. Due to time constraints I won't tell you everything that Warran wrote, so if you want more detail you can go to www.RickWarren.com.

Here is a synopsis of what he wrote: *The church has eight distinct advantages over the efforts of business and government. 1. The church provides for the largest participation. 2. The church provides for the widest distribution. 3. The church provides the longest continuation. 4. The church provides the fastest expansion. 5. The church provides the highest motivation. 6. The church provides the strongest authorization. 7. The church provides the simplest administration. 8. The church provides for God's conclusion.*

Please don't misunderstand me. Both government and the church are ordained by God for distinct roles in the world, but it is the church – the redeemed Body of Christ – who offers these

advantages. And while Rick Warren doesn't say it explicitly, I will. The reason the Body of Christ offers these advantages is because the foundation upon which we build is nothing less than the word of the Living God.

Are you being the church? Are you living up to the divine call of your life as a member of the Body of Christ? Are you a force to be reckoned with in this world? The church has a unique role to play in this world, and even in times as troubling as these, we are the bearers of hope.

As you can tell from Katie's presentation this morning, the Protestant Reformation grew out of a different era in history. The climate was different politically, religiously, and socially. The players were different, too; courageous people like Jan Hus and John Wycliffe, Martin Luther and John Calvin, and William Tyndale and John Owen. These were men who saw the Church for who she really was and they challenged the circumstances. They witnessed salvation being sold, as it were, and stood up to say that salvation comes not from our work, but from the work of Jesus Christ alone; not by what we can pay, but by what Christ already paid. They observed salvation being a function of the church rather than a function of the grace of God bringing faith to those for whom Christ died. These were men who saw tradition trumping truth. And when they did, they did something about it.

What are you observing today? What are you witness to that you know is wrong? How do you even know how to recognize what's wrong? See, the problems experienced in the 1500's – though in a different time and place – are really no different than they are today. You and I still need to know not only what we believe, but why we believe it. The solutions for reform that these great reformers brought to the church were based on nothing less than the Word of God. The standard these great reformers used wasn't psychology, it wasn't Sarbanes-Oxley, it wasn't OSHA...it was the B.I.B.L.E. The standard wasn't tradition or papal dictate, it was the Holy Scriptures.

I'd like to propose this morning that we continue in this rich tradition of using the Holy Scriptures as our sole authority for our faith and practice as Christ-followers.

The text we are looking at this morning is 2 Timothy 3:16,17. And while these two verses alone don't prove that the Bible is our sole authority for faith and practice, it is a good starting point for us. For those of you who were here when we studied the Trinity, you will remember that the term *Trinity* doesn't appear in the Scriptures, but it is a strong hook on which to hang the overall teaching about the nature and character of God. It is the same with this idea of *Sola Scriptura*. The term doesn't appear in the Scriptures, but the concept it communicates is proven again and again by the whole testimony of Scripture about itself; that it is the very word that God intended, as our passage says this morning, *to teach, rebuke, correct and train in righteousness, so that we might be thoroughly equipped for every good work*. And let's be clear: there is no other source about which that is said.

So, this morning, I hope you'll get a small glimpse of the great power of this little miracle you hold in your hand. I want us to see the power, the profession, and the purpose of the Word of God so you can join with the great reformers and stand up to say *Scripture Alone is Our Standard*.

To begin, I want you to recognize three main parts of our text. The first part deals with the power of Scripture. It says that *all Scripture is God-breathed*. In other words, the Bible is inspired by God. Or, to put it another way, the Bible has life – it is living and active much the same way you and I are...God has given it life. It is not empty words on paper, but they are powerful. As Hebrews 4 says, *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we*

must give an account. What Hebrews doesn't say, 2 Timothy does: the Bible is living and active, because God has breathed life into it.

Let me get very specific here: men wrote the Bible, but the words they used are the Words of God, because God gave life to them. He inspired them. He gave them power to do what they do.

The second thing I want you to notice is the profession of Scripture; that is, what is it that Scripture does? Our text says that Scripture is *useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.* This is what Scripture is meant to do. It is what God has given His Word to do.

Some see the word *useful* as limiting Scripture to just these things. But it is clear from context that Paul means to use the word as a means of purpose. Later we will see the purpose of Scripture, but now Paul shows us the means toward that end. Scripture is useful, Paul says, therefore Timothy should use it. Dare I say, because it is useful, we too should use it.

Scripture is profitable for teaching; that is, it causes us to understand God's truth. But it is also useful for rebuke, for bringing conviction to us when we've deviated from that truth. It is also helpful for correction, restoring when we have been in error. And it is useful for training in righteousness. The very words of God guide us, as a parent trains a child, in the right ways of living in God's truth. Warren Wiersbe makes the point, and I think it is a good one: this is a selective list of the ways in which Scripture is useful, it isn't an exhaustive list. He writes, "*They are profitable for doctrine (what is right), for reproof (what is not right), for correction (how to get right), and for instruction in righteousness (how to stay right).*"

Scripture's power comes from God Himself, Scripture's profession is one of putting us on the right track, but the final piece of our text reveals Scripture's purpose. Paul writes, "*so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"

If you have any question what the purpose of the Bible is, it is this: it gives you everything you need to fulfill your calling by God. The phrase, *every good work* is the ultimate goal of our lives according to Ephesians 2:10 which reads, *we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Don't miss that important point: not only are we God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, but God prepared those works in advance for us to do. And wouldn't you know, He gave us a guide to equip us to do it. It is a reminder that God did not give us the Bible to just satisfy our curiosity or to gratify our academic pursuits; rather, God gave us the written Word to enable us to be helped and to help other people spiritually.

We live in a fallen world. Just look around. We live in a world so damaged that we rarely believe that the purple mountains majesties were originally created far more majestic... that the brilliant sunset was created far more brilliantly... that the windows to our soul, as deep and penetrating and as beautiful as they are, betray the depravity within. It takes times like these to wake us up, just as it took times like those to prod the reformers to stand up and declare with Scripture that it alone is the standard for our faith and practice as believers in Christ. We have what we need to do what we've been called to do...to be the church, the bringers of hope, to an otherwise hopeless world. Just as Christ will one day return with His sword drawn, we must draw our sword – the living word of God – to equip us to do all that God is calling us to do.

We've been doing this together for a year now, and I pray we'll continue to do it for many years to come. But unless we keep our sword at hand, unless we practice using what it provides, and unless we let it do its work in us first, we will be impotent to do what God is calling us to do. To follow Christ and lead others to Him. So don't leave your sword in its sheath or on its shelf or in the

back seat of your car. Draw it, use it, and let it fulfill its purpose in your life to equip you for every good work you've been called to do. *Pray with me.*