

God's Sufficient Word (2)

By Todd Pruitt

“The Word is to sublimate and quicken our affections; it is to be our directory and consolatory; it is to waft us over the land of promise.” Thus wrote the great Puritan Thomas Watson over three hundred years ago. Our forefathers in the faith had great confidence in the Sufficiency of God's Word to both generate faith (Rom 10:14-17) and mature the believer (II Tim 3:16). This confidence is what fueled the great Protestant battle cry of *Sola Scriptura!* or *Scripture Alone!* The Word of God trumps all popes, councils, and traditions. All of our doctrine, preaching, worship, and spiritual experience must yield to the scrutiny and authority of God's Word. The Bible reminds us that the content of our doctrine and the shape of our ethics are not matters left to our own determination.

It is vital in our increasingly post-Christian culture that the church once again confidently assert and live by the historic, orthodox, and biblical understanding of God's Word. The church will only be as strong as her understanding of and commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture. What follows in this article and continued in next month's are five words that may aptly be applied to Scripture.

Revelation

Christianity is not something that we intuit or apprehend by force of our own intellect or moral capabilities. Christianity is a revealed faith. Through revelation God unveils knowledge concerning Himself, mankind, sin, and salvation that would otherwise remain hidden from us. In Romans one Paul makes reference to God's general revelation in nature that gives proof of a transcendent Creator. There is enough proof about God's greatness imprinted upon the natural world and the conscience of man that no one escapes personal responsibility for unbelief.

However, if we are going to know God in a meaningful and redemptive way then we must have more than the natural revelation of God's existence. We must have the special revelation of God through the Scriptures. If I am going to know God and the salvation he paid for through His Son then I will need more than discernment or mystical experience. I need God to speak. And God's chosen means to speak to His people is through His Word. Many of the modern approaches to spirituality promise direct access to God without the seemingly mundane mediation of Scripture. But it is through the Bible that God promises to give us what we need for knowledge of Him and maturity in Christ (John 17:17; Romans 15:4; II Timothy 3:16).

Inspiration

Paul wrote that “all Scripture is God-breathed” (II Tim 3:16). The Greek word for “God-breathed” is *theopneustos*. It is a compound word made up of *theos* (God) and *pneuma* (breath). All of Scripture has been breathed out by God. He

has not simply breathed into Scripture after the fact. *Inspiration*, a Latin word used to help us understand this process, related not only to the human writers of Scripture, but also to the words themselves. Inspiration should not be understood to mean that God merely influenced the writers. Rather, God inspired or breathed out the very words that were written. As Donald McLeod has written,

“We are familiar today with the idea of inspired men: for example, poets, composers of music and great orators. These men are said to be inspired and to give inspired performances. But the Bible doesn't speak in this way. It speaks of the quality of *theopneustos*, of God-breathedness, as a quality of the actual book itself” (A Faith to Live By, 11).

This is not to say that the Bible was dictated to men who served unconsciously as God's word processors. The personality, education, and experiences of the human writers of Scripture shine through what they write. And yet God did not merely inspire the ideas of Scripture. In His sovereign power God did not leave the human writers free to write their own ideas. The Old Testament prophets, for instance, did not simply speak ideas from God. They spoke His very words. “I will put My words in your mouth” (Deut 18:18). In II Peter 1:20 the apostle is careful to point out that “no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.” Indeed, “no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man” (v. 21a). So, God's Word is independent of both the interpretation and the will of man. Rather, “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (v. 21b). The human writers of Scripture wrote God's words at God's prompting. They were “carried along by the Holy Spirit” instead of being merely influenced by Him. This is the biblical concept of inspiration. The apostle Paul praised the Thessalonian church because, “when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God” (I Thess 2:13).

“The Scripture is profitable for all things. If we are deserted, here is spiced wine that cheers the heavy heart; if we are pursued by Satan, here is the sword of the Spirit to resist him; if we are diseased with sin's leprosy, here are the waters of the sanctuary, both to cleanse and cure. Oh, then, search the Scriptures!”

- from A Body of Divinity by Thomas Watson