

SERMON IX

from

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"2 Timothy, Chap. iii, Verses 16 and 17"

"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, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

The word of God being called our spiritual sword, there is need of our being armed with it, for in this world the devil continually fights against us, endeavoring to deceive and draw us into sin. Therefore St. Paul says the word of God deserves such reverence that we ought to submit ourselves to it without gainsaying [disputing]. He likewise informs us what profit we receive from it, which is another reason why we should embrace it with reverence and obedience. There have been some fantastical men at all times who would wish to bring the holy scripture into doubt, although they were ashamed to deny that the word of God ought to be received without contradiction. There have always been wicked men who have frankly confessed that the word of God has such a majesty in it that all the world ought to bow before it, and yet they continue to blaspheme and speak evil against God.

Where is the word of God to be found unless we see it in the law, and in the prophets, and in the gospel? There it is that God has set forth his mind to us. To the end, therefore, that men may not excuse themselves, St. Paul plainly shows us that if we will do homage to God and live in subjection to him, we must receive that which is contained in the law and the prophets. And that no man might take the liberty to choose what he pleases, and so obey God in part, he says the whole scripture has this majesty of which he speaks, and that it is all profitable. To be short, St. Paul informs us that we must not pick and cull the scripture to please our own fancy, but must receive the whole without exception. Thus we see what St. Paul's meaning is in this place. For when he speaks of the holy scripture, he does not mean that which he was then writing, neither that of the other apostles and evangelists, but the Old Testament.

Thus we perceive what his mind was, that the law and the prophets should always be preached in the church of Christ, for it is a doctrine that must and will remain forever. Therefore, those that would have the law laid aside and never spoken of again are not to be regarded. They have made it a common proverb in their synagogues and taverns, saying, "We need neither the law nor the prophets anymore." And this is as common a thing among them as among the Turks.

But St. Paul bridles the Christian and tells us that if we will prove our faith and obedience toward God, the law and the prophets must reign over us. We must regulate our lives by them. We must know that it is an abiding and an immortal truth, not flitting nor changeable. For God gave not a temporal doctrine to serve but for a season, for his mind was that it should be in force in these days, and that the world should sooner perish, and heaven and earth decay, than the authority thereof to fail. Thus we see St. Paul's meaning is

that we should suffer ourselves to be governed by the holy scripture, and seek for wisdom nowhere else.

We must observe (as has already been said) that he gives us no liberty to choose what we list [wish], but he will have us to be obedient to God in all respects, approving what is contained in the holy scripture. Now let us notice the two points which are here set forth. He says first, "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God,*" and then adds, "*and is profitable.*" These remarks St. Paul makes upon the holy scripture to induce us to love it, and to show that it is worthy to be received with great humility. When he says it is given by the inspiration of God, it is to the end that no mortal man should endeavor to control his almighty power. Shall miserable creatures make war against God and refuse to accept the holy scripture? What is the cause of this? It is not forged by men (says St. Paul); there is no earthly thing in it. Whosoever will not show himself a rebel against God, and set him at nought, must submit himself to the holy scripture.

St. Paul adds, in the second place, besides the reverence which we owe to God by doing him homage, we must confess moreover that he sought our profit and salvation when it pleased him to teach us by the holy scripture. For he will not have us busy ourselves with unprofitable things. Therefore, if we be diligent in reading the holy scripture, we shall perceive that there is nothing contained in it but what is good and fit for us, from which we may obtain some benefit.

How unthankful we are if we accept not the blessings which God offers so freely! After St. Paul had magnified the holy scripture, showing that the majesty of God appears in it, he would also give us some taste that we might come to it with an affection and desire to profit thereby, knowing that it was God's design and the end he aimed at. Let us always remember that the holy scripture will never be of any service to us unless we be persuaded that God is the author of it. When we read Moses or any of the prophets, as the history of mortal men, do we feel a liveliness of the spirit of God inflaming us? No, no; it is far from it. Therefore the holy scripture will be lifeless and without force until we know it is God that speaks in it, and thereby reveals his will to man. For St. Paul says the holy scripture is given by inspiration of God.

The pope will boast that all he has put forth is from God. Thus we see that by using the name of God for a cloak and covering, the world has been deceived, and kept in ignorance from the beginning. For there never was any poison of false doctrine but that it was put into a golden cup; that is to say, was hid under this honorable title ; *that God spake to man.*

If we are content to be governed by the will of God, our faith will be rightly sealed so that we may perceive that it is not the illusion of Satan, neither a fable invented by men--I mean those things contained in the holy scripture which were spoken by God, who is the author of them. Let us consider the infinite goodness of our God in that it has pleased him to seal up his truth in our hearts and cause us to feel the virtue of it, while unbelievers are left in their ignorance to despise the authority of the holy scripture.

We may gather from what St. Paul says, that there is no authority in the church of God but what is received from him. If then we admit of a doctrine, it must not be borrowed from the authority or wisdom of men, but we must know that it came from God. This is a notable point, for God will prove thereby whether we be his people or not. He is our king indeed,

because we have no laws nor ordinances except from him. Our souls are not guided by chance, for he rules over us, and we are subject to his yoke. If this be not the case, we do not show that God governs us though we make ever so formal pretensions. They are but false shows.

St. Paul does not inform us, in order to prove the holy scripture to be an undoubted truth, that Moses was an excellent man. He does not say that Isaiah was very eloquent. He declares nothing of them whereby he may raise the credit of their persons. But he says they were instruments in the hands of God, their tongues were guided by the Holy Ghost, they spake nothing of their own but it was God that spake by them. We must not consider them as uninspired men but as servants of the living God, as faithful stewards of the treasures committed to them.

If these things had been observed, men would not have come into such horrible confusion, as the papists are at this day. For upon what is their faith grounded except upon men? There is nothing but hypocrisy in all their doings. It is true they declare God's name, but in the meantime [they] observe their own ceremonies. But St. Paul requires us to confine ourselves to the holy scripture, because God speaks there and not man. Thus we see he excludes all human authority. God must have the pre-eminence above all creatures whatsoever. They must submit themselves to him and not presume to encroach upon his sovereignty. When we go into the pulpit, we ought to be assured that it is God that sent us and that we bring the message which he committed to us.

Let him that speaks, speak according to the word of God; that is, let him show that he does not thrust himself in rashly nor patch up with any of his own works, but that he holds forth the truth of God in its purity. He must make his doctrine edifying to the people, that God may be honored thereby. Seeing the doctrine of men is here cast down, let us banish it from the church of Christ, that it may never be admitted again. Therefore, let us beware and keep ourselves steadfast in the simplicity of the gospel, for our Lord has been so gracious as to reveal his will to us by the law and the prophets. Then, let us hold fast that which we have received and not suffer men to bind our consciences and frame articles of faith for us according to their own notions.

St. Paul says, *all scripture is profitable*. Therefore, if the holy scripture be profitable, we are very unthankful in not applying ourselves to the study of it. Who is there among us that does not desire profit and salvation? And where can it be found except in the holy scripture? Woe be unto us then if we hear not the word of God, who seeks nothing but our happiness. Moreover, we must not read the holy scripture in order to support our own notions and favorite sentiments, but [in order to] submit ourselves unto the doctrine contained therein; agreeably to the whole contents of it, for it is all profitable.

When I expound the holy scripture I must always compass myself by it, that those who hear me may be profited by the doctrine held forth and receive edification thereby. If I have not this affection, if I do not edify those that hear me, I commit sacrilege and profane the word of God. Those also who read the holy scripture or come to hear the sermon, if they seek any foolish speculations, if they come hither to recreate themselves, they are guilty of profaning the gospel. If we divert the holy scripture from its proper use, and seek questions in it without endeavoring to profit by it, we pollute it.

St. Paul has taught us that we must come to God with earnest desires, seeing he seeks nothing but our profit and salvation. He shows us also that we must not pollute the holy scripture to make it serve our own fancy. But knowing it is God's mind that it should be made profitable to us, we must come thither to be taught--yea, and taught in that which will be profitable for our salvation. Now it remains for us severally [each] to examine and see what this profit is. If St. Paul had pronounced but this one word, the sense might have been somewhat obscure. But he opens it so plainly that we cannot mistake his meaning, for he says, "The scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

St. Paul does not set forth a single use of the holy scripture, but when he has spoken of the doctrine he adds, "*to reprove, correct, and instruct.*" And why so? It is not enough for God to show us what is good, because we are so cold that we should hardly perceive it. Therefore he must needs stir us up to an earnestness. We must know that he speaks to us, and that we are bound to obey. Thus we see there is no dead doctrine in the holy scripture, but there are reproofs and corrections to stir us up that we may come to God.

St. Paul says *all scripture is profitable for doctrine*, and then adds, *to reprove, correct, &c.* Why begins he with this word *doctrine*? Because it is the natural order; for if we are not taught to say this is the truth, exhortation will be of no use. Therefore, we must first of all be made sensible that that which is taught us is good, and true, and right. Thus the word *doctrine* signifies that we must be instructed in the truth, that we must be thoroughly resolved in it, and so edified by it; that we doubt not its authenticity. St. Paul informs us that this doctrine is to know Jesus Christ, and put our whole trust in him, to live soberly, righteously, and godly.

When we call upon God by prayer and supplication, we must put our trust in him and look to the heavenly life whereunto he calls us. We must mortify all our wicked affections and conform ourselves to his righteousness. The doctrine of the gospel, in few words, is this: to know God and put our whole trust in him, and to know by what means he is our Saviour--namely, in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, who died for our justification. This is the way whereby we are reconciled to God and cleansed from all sin, from which proceeds the confidence we have to call upon him, knowing that he will not cast us off when we come in the name of him who is appointed our advocate.

When we consider that there is nothing but sin and wickedness in us, we must learn to be displeased with ourselves and serve God fervently, with a pure heart. This is the doctrine contained in the holy scripture. We must understand the meaning of St. Paul when he says *to reprove*. That is, if we would be well instructed in the school of God we must confess ourselves guilty, we must be pricked to the heart, we must be reprov'd for our faults. When the word of God is rightly expounded the faithful are not only edified; but if an unbeliever come into the church and hear the doctrine of God, he is reprov'd and judged. By this we understand that although the unbeliever may be wrapped in darkness and pleased with his own ignorance, yet when God so enlightens him--that he sees the misery and wickedness in which he has lived, when he sees his deplorable situation (while giving ear to the word of God)--he perceives the heavens open as it were, and that man was not made for this life only but to be exalted to a higher station. Thus unbelievers are convicted.

And to make it more clear, St. Paul adds, the secrets of the heart are then disclosed. For we know while the word of God is buried, no man takes heed to himself. Our hearts are in darkness. What then must we do? We must apply the word of God to our use, and be awakened out of sleep. We must no more forget God, nor the salvation of our own souls. We must search the very depth of our hearts and examine our whole lives, that we may be ashamed of our filthiness, and become our own judges, to avoid the condemnation that is ready at the hand of God. Thus we understand what St. Paul means by the word *reproof*.

It is not enough for men to lay the blessings of God before us and say, This is God's will. But we must be awakened to think upon it in good earnest, and look narrowly to ourselves--yea, and to draw near to God as if he had summoned us to appear before his judgment seat. We must bring all to light that we may be ashamed of our evil deeds. And when we breathe into this heavenly air, we must be careful not to turn aside from the right way.

It is not enough to be thus *reproved*, but *correction* must be added likewise. We must be chastised as it were by the word of God, to the end we may be reformed. We must forsake our sins, we must be sharply dealt with that they may be plucked out by the roots and separated from us. Thus when we have been roused to think upon God, we feel condemned before him while our sins are laid open to view, and we become guilty in the sight of both God and man. Moreover, we must be drawn to it by force. If we have been drunk with delicacies, if we have indulged ourselves in folly and vanity and have thereby been deceived, the corrections must be quick and severe, that we may give God the honor, and suffer him to reform us and bring us into subjection to his will.

When a father sees his children conduct themselves improperly and viciously, he thinks it not enough to say, "Why do you so?" But he will say, "You wretched creatures, have I brought you up and hitherto fostered you to recompense me thus? Does it become you to do me this dishonor after I have used you so gently? You deserve to be given into the hands of the hangman." So it is with us. When God sees that we are more rebellious against him than disobedient children are against earthly parents, has he not occasion to be angry with us? Not that there are any unruly passions in him, but he uses this earnestness that we may be brought into subjection and learn to obey him.

Now we may judge whether it would be enough for a man, when he would expound the holy scripture, to discourse upon it as though it were a mere history. For if it were so, that which St. Paul says concerning it is unprofitable. It would be sufficient for him to have said, To preach the gospel we need only say, "thus spake God." The office of a good and faithful shepherd is not barely to expound the scripture, but he must use earnestness and sharpness to give force and virtue to the word of God. St. Paul says in another place that the shepherds of the church must be earnest, even to be importunate, and not only show the people what is good but [to] reprove them.

It is true [that] he says it must be done meekly, mildly, and patiently. But however it be, corrections must be used. Men must not say, This is too hard to be borne, you must not deal after this sort. Let those who cannot suffer reproof seek another master beside God, for they are not worthy to hear his word. The world would gladly be spared, and we see many who are ready to burst with rage when they are threatened and corrected. They say that they wish to be won by mildness. Then let them go to the devil's school; he will flatter, yea, and destroy them.

But as for the faithful, after they have received the doctrine they must humble themselves and be willing to receive reproof. They must be exhorted when they have done amiss. They must be reprov'd for their sins and offences, that they may be purged from all iniquity. In this manner we must behave ourselves if we wish to be instructed in the doctrine of God. St. Paul adds, *the scripture is profitable for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.* When he says that the holy scripture is profitable to instruct in righteousness, he shuts out whatsoever man might bring, showing that we shall not become righteous by observing the works introduced by man.

We see how the papists torment themselves in vain, observing whatsoever is enjoined upon them by men. In what consists their righteousness? Upon what is it grounded? It is grounded upon this--*the church so commands.* But St. Paul shows that there is neither religion nor doctrine except in that which is contained in the holy scripture; yea, and in that only is righteousness. Do they then follow that which God has commanded? No, for they go entirely contrary to it. Therefore, if we wish to have our lives well framed, let us not ground ourselves upon the works of men, but let us follow that which God enjoins upon us.

If we regulate our lives by the instructions contained in the holy scripture, we shall be justified thereby; but the doctrine of men is but folly and an abomination to God. Then let us remember it is not without cause that St. Paul says *to instruct in righteousness.* Again, he gives us to understand that to be good divines we must live holy lives. The word of God is not given to teach us how to talk, to make us eloquent and subtle, but to reform our lives that the world may know we are the servants of God. If we wish to know whether a man profits by the gospel or not, let us mark his life. Men may know how to talk, they may make a fair profession of godliness, and yet not have their lives correspond with the written word of God.

St. Paul informs us that we must make the word of God our counsellor, that we may walk uprightly and form our lives by it. Thus, *the man of God may be perfect and furnished unto all good works.* In this manner we must be instructed in righteousness and reject the inventions of men, for with them God is not well pleased. Men wish to serve God according to their own notions, and therefore bring their own works into the account. But God will not allow them. St. Paul seeing such impudent boldness in men--that they cannot keep themselves within the bounds which God has set them--points out the disease, that it may be healed. He says, if we have the word of God in our hearts we shall be upright in life, and furnished unto all good works.

Men may boast as much as they please that their works are virtuous and holy; but when they shall appear before the heavenly judge, all will be as chaff. When we mix our inventions with that which God has commanded, we injure all. Therefore we may conclude that whatever things are forged by men are nothing but corruptions. The papists call these good works--to fast upon a saint's eve, to eat no flesh upon Friday, to keep Lent, to serve saints, to go from altar to altar and from chapel to chapel to attend mass, to go on pilgrimage, &c. They have forged so many laws and statutes that a man cannot understand them. But we must at last appear before the great judge to give an account of all our actions.

It is said here that we shall be furnished unto all good works if we profit by the holy

scripture. But what will become of the traditions and inventions of the papists, in which the word of God seems to be buried? They make not one hundredth part as much of the word of God as they do of men's traditions. Therefore let us not deceive ourselves willingly, considering we shall have the measure of our perfection. God shuts out whatsoever is added to the holy scripture, and shows that it shall not be reckoned or received by him. Therefore men make their items in vain; it will but double their condemnation.

A man might ask, Of what use is the gospel, seeing there is so much uprightness in the law and the prophets? This may be easily answered. The gospel was not given to add anything to the law or the prophets. Let us read the New Testament. We shall not find one syllable added to either. It is only setting forth that which was taught before more plainly. It is true that God has been more gracious to us than to the fathers who lived before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, matters being more clearly set forth to us, although there is nothing added. So then, when St. Paul says that we shall find uprightness and perfect righteousness in the law and in the prophets, it diminishes not the gospel.

There is an agreement in all the holy scripture; of the *Old*, and *New* Testament. The doctrine which was contained in the law has been expounded so familiarly to us by the apostles since Jesus Christ, that we cannot say we must do this or that; but we must confine ourselves to that which was commanded from the beginning. God has made known his will in such clear terms, and has given so many reasons why we should believe it, that we must be convinced of its truth, unless we are monsters in wickedness. Therefore, if we will profit by the holy scripture we must study holiness of life, knowing that God will not be served after our own fancy; for he has given us a certain rule whereby we should regulate our lives, and such a one as cannot be found fault with. Let us then direct our hearts, thoughts, and affections to that which is contained in the holy scripture, and then the heavenly judge will receive us. We must be the more induced to attend to these things because our good God draws so nigh and sets forth his will in such a plain manner to us, that we cannot excuse ourselves, unless we cleave wholly to him.