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**"The Usefulness of Scripture"  
(2 Timothy 3:14-17)  
Pastor Peter Yi  
January 15, 2017**

**(2 Timothy 3:14-17)**

<sup>14</sup> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup> and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

As I was preparing for this message, it dawned on me that this is an incredibly important passage. You might say, don't you say that about every passage to which I would say, 'yes, you are right.' But this passage is really important. Within this passage there are so many valuable lessons and I really didn't want for us to miss any of it. So what I'm going to today is just walk us through this passage. Usually I usually say there are three points or here's the problem and there's the solution. But today with this passage, I'm going to go through it almost word for word, section by section to help us apply this to our lives.

This letter is Paul's last final letter after an illustrious career serving God by telling others about Jesus Christ. Paul is writing this letter from prison to his understudy, Timothy. There is no one that Paul has more affection for than Timothy. Timothy was hand-picked by Paul to be his traveling companion and trainee in the work of Christian ministry. Timothy is pastoring a church in Ephesus. Paul while in prison, is unsure if his imprisonment will end. He's advancing in years and perhaps these will be his last words.

So this letter can be seen as Paul's final words of advice before he departs this world and goes to heaven. One author, John Stott, summarizes the contents of this letter like this. "Guard the Gospel." One of the things we'll find in this letter is an emphasis, a focus on doctrine, teaching, preaching, and the Scriptures.

Imagine this scenario. You're 85 years old and you're dying. You only have about a week or so left before you're too exhausted to even speak, so you gather you spouse, your children, grandchildren and maybe even the little grandchildren. What will be your final words? When my mom was dying of cancer, I'd try to call her as often as I could and almost every time we spoke, she would always sneak in these words, "Peter, pray. You have to pray. There's nothing more important than prayer. That's where your spiritual power will come from. Pray, pray, pray!" My mom's been gone almost 20 years and those words still haunt me. Now, if I were on my deathbed, I don't know if I could top the words my mom said to me. Maybe I would say what she said and add, "read the Bible" or "love the Lord" or "serve the Lord" or something like that. I think that's what Paul is doing here. These are his final words. Let's pay attention to what he says.

Okay ready? Let's dive in.

<sup>14</sup> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup> and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.  
**(2 Tim 3:14-17 NIV11-GK)**

The passage begins with the word “**but**” which points back to a group of people that Paul warns against and this is the sentence that summarizes what they’re like,

[They are] always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.  
(2 Tim 3:6–7 NIV11-GK)

I wonder if we can be like that at times. We are always learning, but never coming to a knowledge of the truth.” They are the half-convinced; the inquisitive, never running out of questions, but also never coming to a conclusion. Always seeking, but not having committed. This is a warning we should all heed.

Paul then says to Timothy, “But for you, you have to be different.” **Continue in what you have learned.** Consider how much teaching Timothy has received throughout his lifetime?

I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. (2 Tim 1:5 NIV11-GK)

Like many of us he was a generational Christian. And according to verse 15, he knew the Holy Scriptures from his infancy.

Let’s take a time out here for a second. Let me speak to teachers in our children’s ministry and parents and even aunts and uncles. I cannot stress how important your role is for the young people under your care. If you’re a parent, one of your primary roles is to cultivate spiritual transformation in your children through the Scriptures. Only God can transform hearts and lives, but he always uses human agents and the Scriptures to do so. So what does that mean? That means that you must believe that your child’s experience with Scripture is more important than math, hockey, dance, birthday parties and the like. Church attendance and Sunday school must always take precedence over extra-curricular activities. Let’s not think lightly of the cumulative effect on a child who has had a lifetime of teaching in the Scriptures. End of time-out.

So, even though Timothy had a lifetime of learning and now he’s in a place where his role is to teach the Scriptures to others, Paul still says to him...continue in what you have learned.

Our church was hosting a pastor’s meeting a couple years ago and I was leading the ice breakers. I asked everyone to introduce yourself, where you pastor and what book you’ve reading that has been of some benefit. And so one by one, young and old, they shared their books. And then we came to a pastor who has on the plus side of the average age and he said, “Well, I don’t read books anymore.” I almost fell out of my chair. There’s so much to know, so much to learn, how could a pastor of all people stop reading. One of my seminary professors said to our class, “you know when a pastor has died by looking at his library.”

Friends the same goes with all of us too. You and I never stop learning and applying the things that we’ve learned about God and Christian living from the Scriptures.

Paul also mentions to Timothy that these things that he has learned, he **has become convinced of**, unlike those other people who are always learning but never coming to a knowledge of the truth. For all Christians and seekers alike, there has to come many moments in our lives where we become convinced of the things we have learned. What are some of those things?

The most important thing is to come to the conclusion that the Bible is the word of God. It is true and without error. It is sufficient and beneficial and instructive for all spiritual matters, all moral and ethical issues, all relational matters. There has to come a point in every Christian’s life where we no longer investigate this but become convinced of this.

We need to become convinced of what the Bible teaches about almost every subject. Don't we need to be convinced about its teaching on sin, on humanity, on sexuality, on ethics, on church, on fellowship. The topics are almost endless. What comes from being convinced? Conviction. We're no longer wishy washy, we're no longer the half-convinced. We become certain and confident in God's word.

**Paul also writes that Timothy should continue in the Scriptures because you know from whom you have learned it.** Now what does he mean by that? He's referring to the authenticity of his teachers. He's saying, consider your grandmother and mother and the sincere and rich faith that they had. And remember me too, my lifestyle, my integrity. Now, consider the implications of this. What Paul is implying here is this. The spiritual character of the teacher is very important. The authenticity, the genuineness of the parent, the teacher, the friend, as it regards the faith, is very, very important. Conversely, a disingenuous, a hypocritical, an inauthentic person will be less effective, if not altogether ineffective in matters of faith. The application is simple so I won't go into it. If we are in any kind of teaching role, we must do it with the utmost care by being sincere and trustworthy and authentic teachers.

In verse 15 Paul writes that **the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures makes us 'wise for salvation.'** That's an unusual combination of words. What does that phrase mean? The Holy Scriptures makes us wise, or gives us wisdom. That's one of the purposes or results of reading and understanding the Bible. Consider all the truths, all the advice that's found in the Bible. If we were to apply just 10% of all those things, just imagine how wise we would be. We would know how to do what was right, how to please and honor God, how to best serve and bless our neighbor, how to tactfully deal with conflicts. In all the difficult situations that life brings about, we'd possess the tools to handle them all. That's what the Scriptures do...they make us wise.

But, the wisest thing a person can do is to be saved, that is to be made right with God, to have their sins forgiven, to receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and savior. That is the wisest thing a person can do. If you had the wisdom of Confucius and that wisdom didn't help you get right with God, you would remain a great fool. So in this statement we discover the primary goal of Scripture. By knowing the Scriptures and understanding the Scriptures and accepting the Scriptures as God's truth, we can learn how to receive salvation.

How then does one receive salvation? Paul tells us. Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures makes us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Now consider how important this statement is. Paul is saying that when we read the Scriptures, and in particular the Old Testament Scriptures, because that is what he was primarily referring to, the purpose of all those 39 books was to show us how we might be saved through faith in Jesus Christ. That's it!

You might think that conclusion is a stretch. Well, okay, let me show you what our Lord Jesus Christ said at the very end of the gospel of Luke. Here's my paraphrase of the story. After Jesus had risen from the dead, he met a couple of his disciples, but because of his transformed nature, he wasn't recognized by them. The disciples ask, hey have you heard the latest? Jesus says, What's that? And they say, Where've you been, living in a cave? And Jesus is thinking, "Yeah, sort of." So the disciples tell Jesus about Jesus a prophet, a powerful preacher and a worker of miracles, that he was crucified, but then we heard accounts that he had come back to life.

Now this is what's really interesting. Jesus didn't remove the veil and say, "Duh! It's me!" Instead, he had Bible study with them. Listen to what Luke writes.

<sup>25</sup> He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:25–27 NIV11-GK)

The Old Testament (and the New Testament for that matter) was written so that all people could read, listen, and understand that we have a problem...that we are sinners. And God has a solution...that through faith in Jesus Christ we can have salvation. That is why it is so preposterous to think that there is any other authority on this matter than the Scriptures as our Catholic friends believe. Yes, they believe in the authority of the Scriptures like we do, but their error is that they add to the Scriptures, tradition. And tradition by definition is made by man. As well, how could one hold to the absolute authority of the Scriptures and at the same time hold to papal infallibility? It's an offense and contradiction to the very word of God.

We're now at verse 16:

<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Here's how commentators have written on the phrase "**All Scripture.**" One commentator says that it means, "Every text of Scripture...leaving no text of Scripture unaccounted for." Another commentator says it can be translated "All Scripture referring to Scripture as a whole, or "Every Scripture" referring to every one of its component parts. So every or all Scripture is God-breathed, sometimes it's translated *inspired*, but the NIV has it right. It literally means breathed by God. This word is found only here in the entire Bible. So what does it mean? It's saying that the source of Scripture is the breath of God; which is another way of saying Scripture comes from the mouth of God; which is another way of saying that source or the origin of Scripture is none other than God himself. The Scriptures are the very words of God.

Why is this important? It's important because we may think some parts of the Bible as more authoritative than other parts of the Bible. For example, in the OT there are those direct God quotes, "Thus says the Lord..." A reader might think, well, I better pay close attention here because these are God's very words, but then you get to some other sections and we may hold a lesser view toward those parts. There's been one recent Christian leader who started promoting a movement called "Red Letter Christians" meaning let's just focus on the words of Jesus. Now there are so many errors in this movement I don't know where to begin. First it flies in the face of Jesus' view toward Scripture. Jesus would never have encouraged people to read or listen only to his words and to neglect what Moses or Isaiah and all the other OT writers had written.

The Red Letter movement also flies in the face of this very verse that tells us that all Scripture is breathed/inspired and find their source in God. This is the view we must also have.

Now, if the Scripture are God's very words, what then does that mean for us? It means they are **useful**. Useful can also mean helpful. They have an intended purpose. It is effective to accomplish its goal. And that's what the next part address.

It answers the question...useful for what? Well we already know that it's useful for making us wise for salvation. But what else is it useful for? Paul gives us four more things. It is useful for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting and for training in righteousness. Let's look at each of them one by one.

### **Teaching**

Teaching refers to instruction. Teaching the truth. Teaching content, information about what? About God, who he is, what he is like...his nature, his character. That he's the creator, the redeemer and savior. That he is one, but exists as three.

There's teaching about humanity, that we were created in God's image, that we are sinful and fallen beings.

There's teaching about how sinful people can be made right with God.

### **Rebuking**

Rebuke means to refute error of any kind. It carries the meaning of convicting of sin. One of the purposes of the Scriptures is to make us aware of sin. It is by the Scriptures that we see that we ourselves or someone else is living in sin or living out sinful behavior. And by the Scriptures we would reproof and rebuke ourselves or another person. Here a simple.

Let's say you were at a small group gathering of some kind and the discussion was getting a bit heated and in your emotion you said some unkind words. So after the gathering one of the people there approaches you and says, "hey sister, that was getting pretty intense, wasn't it? I don't know if you noticed, but I think you may have offended the other person. I was looking at her while you were talking and she looked pretty bothered. I didn't sense you speaking with gentleness and love. It might be good to apologize to her."

### **Correcting**

If rebuking implies pointing out the fault according to the Scriptures, then correcting implies leading them to the truth as its found in Scriptures. Paul uses this method repeatedly. Let me give you an example:

Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. (**Eph 4:28 NIV11-GK**)

That's what it means to correct someone who is in error.

### **Training in Righteousness**

The word training can also be translated, to educate. It was a word used in those times in trying to build up virtue and character in a person's life. It means is that our growth as Christians is to be seen as growth in righteousness, which means growth in holiness and obedience. So, Scripture is our training manual to grow to be more like God.

So, those are the four purposes of Scripture: Teaching, Rebuking, Correcting, and Training in Righteousness

Can you see the pattern? We teach, and then there's a rebuke, then there's correcting, and then more training. And this cycle goes on and on and on. Do you have people in your life that can speak that truth to you? This is why it is so important to be in close fellowship with other Christians.

Now, the last verse, verse 17, tells us the expected outcome of this purposeful application of Scripture in our lives. **So that the servant of God might be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

Here's what we learn from this. Look at the superlatives. Thoroughly equipped for every good work. This teaches us that the Bible is sufficient. Sometimes we by-pass the Bible and we want to just read a book on prayer or relationships. And of course I would commend those books to you. I've read dozens of them, but never as a substitute for the Bible. Only the Bible can thoroughly equip us for every good work.

What else? It tells what a pastor is supposed to do. Perhaps the most important job description for a pastor is to teach and preach the Word of God. The pastor doesn't manage the church. The pastor isn't some kind of religious CEO. The pastor is first and foremost a preacher, a teacher of the word of God. Remember this was a personal letter from Paul to Timothy, giving his final advice. And he tells him, stick to the Scriptures. They're useful, they're sufficient for your task as a pastor.

There are only a few pastors in the room so why do you need to know this? Well, there will come the day when I will not be your pastor. I could die, get sick, God might call me to Uganda. Who knows. And you'll have to find another pastor. As well, your life situation may change and you may end up at another church in a different city or on the other side of town. And you'll have to discern if that church is for you...first and foremost, not by how cool their worship team is...not on how fresh their coffee is, nor on how smiley their greeters are, but on the quality of their preaching. This is what will feed your souls.

Also, we learn that the Scriptures are the essential basis of our Christian growth. Another way to say that is like this. Discipleship is getting Christians to learn and apply the Bible to their lives. All of us are disciples and disciple makers and our instruction book is the Bible. Consider once again the pattern. Teach, Rebuke, Correct, Train in Righteousness. Doesn't that sound like discipleship to you?

Friends, this is the purpose of the Bible. It can help you know God as your Creator and Savior. It can help you grow as a Christian, to be mature and also become equipped to teach and help others, in other words, it'll help you be a great disciple maker. Let's not neglect the word. Make it a daily part of your lives. Read it every day, apply it to your life. Pause often as you read to seek greater understanding and have deeper reflection and response to God.

Let's pray.