



Number 2

The All Sufficient Word

Taught by David Robinson

TRANSCRIPT

"We Believe in the infallible, verbal inspiration of the whole Bible and that the Bible is the all-sufficient rule of faith and practice."

There are many societies that have suffered total moral collapse, and in each case the first sign of impending disaster, the first outward mark of inward deterioration, was a shift in their view of the authority of the Word of God. There is an observable link between moral decline and the authority of Scripture, and I would like to introduce this message with two passages that underscore that truth.

Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever. (Psalms 119:160)

In Paul's second letter to Timothy, the apostle said,

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 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. (2 Timothy 3:12-17)

Notice how he moves from the theme of deterioration of faith and moral collapse to the remedy and cure for the believer, an adherence to the written word of God. As Paul presented it here, the defense of a Christian in a day of moral decline is a thorough knowledge of the written Scriptures, while any defection from faith which may take place is brought about by abandoning the Scriptures, in attitude or in action.

The Word of God has been under attack for many centuries. Like an ancient fortress it has withstood many assaults. Up to and through the 17th century these attacks were primarily outward. That is, they were an assault from without by men who tried to destroy the Scriptures by direct methods. History is full of accounts of book burnings, papal interdicts, and even the murder of translators of the Word of God. But these outward attacks against the Bible completely failed. In the 18th century a new approach was taken. Instead of sending soldiers to attack the fortress, to continue this illustration, the enemies of the Bible sent workmen, who came offering to remodel the whole structure. They said, in effect, "This is a good, strong building. It simply needs a bit of renovation here and there." They began to rearrange the structure of God's Word. They drained the moat, tore down the wall, removed the doors, and when they were through everything was quite different than it was before. There was no longer any fortress and no longer any defense for those who would seek refuge.

This attack from those who stand in pulpits and who sit in theological chairs in seminaries will not have any permanent or lasting effect on the churches of the Lord. Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," Matthew 16:18. No earthly power will overthrow the Word of God, but as far as individuals are concerned, it is possible for these attacks against the Scripture to upset their faith, and it is this that Paul warned about as he wrote to Timothy from his prison in Rome.

I would like to share with you four facts that must govern our thinking as we approach the subject of the authority and use of the Scriptures in the 21st century. These apply to everyone, but especially to those who are Christians.

1. As Children of God we must have the same view of Scripture that Jesus had.

That is the first fact we must keep in mind as we come to this subject of the inspiration and authority of the Word. To put it another way, the authority of the Bible rests squarely on the authority of Jesus Christ himself. To be a Christian at all means that we have fully accepted the authority of Jesus. If we have not, we are not Christians; we merely wear the name. It is an utter inconsistency to say that we accept what the Bible says about Christ and then reject what Jesus says about the Bible. We cannot say of Jesus that he is the image of the invisible God, the bodily expression of the fullness of God, that in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and that he is before all things and by him all things hold together, but he is completely wrong about Adam and Noah and Jonah and the rest of the Old Testament. Can you see the utter inconsistency of that position? We cannot call him Lord, and say he has the right to govern our life, all our attitudes and ways and that we even trust our eternal destiny into his hands, but we cannot trust him when he speaks about the creation of man, or the sanctity of marriage, or the sinfulness of certain behavior. We are utterly inconsistent if we take this position.

If we merely read the New Testament we will see that Jesus casts the mantle of his authority over all of the Old Testament, and, by anticipation, over all of the New. Remember he said, speaking of the Old Testament, “*the scripture cannot be broken*,” (John 10:35). Over and over again he quoted from the Old Testament, usually the exact same books and passages that modern scholars say are in dispute. Jesus used them and quoted freely from them as an authority. In his own personal ministry it was with the written Word of God, from the Book of Deuteronomy, that Jesus used to defeat Satan when he came to tempt him in the wilderness.

Then there is the remarkable passage in Luke, the 24th chapter, when Jesus is speaking to his disciples after his resurrection and he rebuked them for their failure to believe the Scriptures. He said:

Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:25-27)

Now, if we read verse 27 from the viewpoint and use language of modern commentators who are telling us today that the Scriptures are no longer authoritative, it would read something like this: *And beginning with Moses, he exposed all the myths & legends used to unveil to the disciples, the epistemological concepts of his authentic being.* But that kind of language, so often used today, does not illuminate the gospel; it destroys it. It substitutes incomprehensible jargon for the clear word of Scripture.

Imagine, for instance, sitting down beside a humble farmer in some village and trying to explain existential concepts to him. You would simply have no gospel to preach. Yet this precisely what is being widely taught today as a necessary requisite to the proper understanding of the Scriptures. This is complete nonsense. Such thinking completely destroys the essential message of the gospel in its simplicity. You may be an old and experienced Christian with a thorough knowledge of the Bible, or you may be a brand new Christian who hardly has any knowledge at all of what it says, and you may have many questions about various aspects of the Bible, but if you are a Christian at all, and have received eternal life through believing on Jesus, you must, by that very fact, also be subject to his authority in the matter of accepting or rejecting the Scriptures as authoritative. That is the first fact.

2. As Christians, we must have the same view of scripture that the Apostles Held.

Jesus and the Apostles are our teachers; we are not theirs. We cannot stand and look over the apostles' shoulders, and correct their work. The apostles, in writing the New Testament, everywhere declare that their authority is simply the Lord's authority. They, too, rest the authority of their words squarely upon the authority of the Lord Jesus. Paul said, "*I have declared unto you only that which I have received,*" (1 Corinthians 15:3).

In other words, Paul was not making up his own message. He was not preaching something borrowed from this philosophy, and that authority, and this way of thinking. It was not received from men at all. Paul specifically and clearly declared that he did not in any way receive his message from men, or even from the other apostles, but from the Lord Jesus Christ directly. *But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.* (Galatians 1:11, 12)

The apostles are very conscious that the words of the message they preached were the words of God. Listen to Paul, writing to the Thessalonians: *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) Here is a clear declaration that Paul knew he was speaking more than his own thoughts, more than his own ideas, more than his own concepts.

The apostles regarded each other's words in this same light. There is that striking passage in 2 Peter 3:15 where Peter said, "*And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking of them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.*" (2 Peter 3:15-16)

Peter makes it very clear that he accepted Paul's writings as Scripture, and the early churches accepted these apostolic writings as the words of Jesus from the beginning. In light of this, when a professor behind a desk or a Mullah in Arabia makes a pronouncement that differs from what Paul or Peter or James or John has said, then reject it, for that "authority" is two thousand years too late to make an adequate and proper judgment. These men who lived in the first century knew Jesus, they heard his words, and they ministered in His power throughout the world of their day and transformed the generation in which they lived. They knew far more about what God thought and said than any man studying theology today. So our second fact is that, in consideration of the authority of the Word, we must remember that, as Christians, we have no right to a different view of Scripture than that held by the apostles, or we cannot consistently call ourselves Christians.

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3. We can never discover the teaching of Scripture without first accepting it as true and authoritative. What I am saying is that we must first believe Scripture before we can understand it. We will never understand the Word if we keep asking, “Should this passage be here? Is it genuine, is it real? Has it been inserted? Is it a legend? Is it a fairy tale? Is it something that is merely the thinking of the apostles and was never in the mind of Christ?” If this is our approach then we will never ask, “What does this say to me? What does it mean? Where is the wisdom that I need so desperately in my life?” Those pseudo students and false scholars who feel they are a final authority on what ought to be in the Bible, and what ought not to be there, never seem to be able to understand what the Bible says to them. They exclude themselves from understanding by their attitude of judgment.

Let me be clear here. We are deeply indebted to scholars gone before for the painstaking work that has been done in Bible knowledge. The entire Bible has been examined like no other book ever written, word by word, and letter by letter, by the greatest body of scholars that has ever concentrated its knowledge on one subject. The task has been done, and it has been well done, and we can trust our scholarly Greek texts and the careful English translations that are based on them. There are many translations today that are interesting but not necessarily trustworthy, because they are only paraphrases.

We must remember the truth of Hebrews 4:12:

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

Of course, there are problems in any translation process. It is necessary to reconcile certain passages with other passages and certain accounts with parallel accounts, but these are simply the normal difficulties that come when there is more than one witness to any event, and they are differences of observation and never differences of fact. The Lord is in charge and the Bible that we have can be trusted.

My point is, we can never understand the Bible until we believe it first. You cannot understand mathematics until you first believe the underlying principles that have to do with that part of human knowledge. You can never understand chemistry unless you are willing to accept the chemical formulas that have been set forth. You cannot believe anything until you accept it as genuine and put it to the test of experience. When you believe that the Bible is from God and, as Proverbs says, “*Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures;*” (Proverbs 2:3:4), then this book will reveal to you the marvels of a deliberately patterned structure that could only be made by God, and it will reveal astounding truth about life and how the human heart operates.

One of my favorite expressions is, “The Bible says . . .” I do not debate it with anyone; I do not question it; I simply declare it. Which brings me to the fourth, fact concerning the Word.

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4. Scripture does not need to be defended; it needs to be preached.

Charles Spurgeon's classic illustration puts it forcefully. He said, "*The Bible is like a lion. Who ever heard of defending a lion? Just turn it loose, it will defend itself.*" And so will Scripture!

I must confess that over the years, I have changed my view of the place and use of the practice of defending the faith. I once thought that the science of the defense of Scripture was needed to answer the skeptic and the agnostic. I remember how I would turn to archaeology, to logic, or to scientific confirmations of Scripture to try and convince a skeptic that the Bible was true. Over the years I have learned not to do that. I realize that such teaching may be very helpful for a Christian or anyone else who is confronted with honest doubts, but it is almost totally useless in approaching a skeptic or an agnostic.

I have approached people with the question, "Do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God?" If they said, "Yes I do," we were on solid ground. I knew where to go from there. But when they said to me, as they so frequently do, "No, I don't," I did not know what to say next. Where do you go if people reject what you must use as your authority?

But I now believe that it is a mistake to ask that question in the first place. Why should I ask whether they believe the Bible is the Word of God? How could I expect them to believe it? Only a Christian has believed it enough to put it to that test. Question like these are putting the cart before the horse. All that is necessary is to use the Scriptures. If it is the word of God it will confirm itself. It will have in itself inherent power and authority. After all, any word has power only because of the one who speaks it. The word itself is meaningless.

If a man who is a habitual liar makes a statement, it may be true but it has no effect because he is known to be a liar. So a word has power only by virtue of the one who utters it. The word of our President has power not because he is a man; there are a lot of other men, not because he is a Democrat or Republican, but because he is the President of the United States! As long as he remains President, there is an inherent power in the word that he speaks by virtue of his office. Now if Scripture is from God, it will have inherent power. When I talk with someone who does not accept the gospel or who challenges the Bible, I do not bother with defense of the Scriptures; I just go right to the Word. I quote the words of Jesus. I simply say, "Well, Jesus said . . ." I confront that individual directly with the compelling truth that Jesus uttered and I find that this has a power to go deep into the human heart, to pierce beyond all the surface objections which are raised and bring men face to face with the choices they must make. I talk about the change the gospel has made in my life, how the Bible has explained life to me, how it has led me from uncertainty into a rich awareness of life, into a place of rest and peace of heart and freedom from the fear that grips the hearts of so many men here on earth.

The whole testimony of a church should be that the preaching of the Bible establishes its authority. We do not need to defend it, we need to declare it, and proclaim it. Nothing explains the world situation like the Bible. No philosophy among men today ever comes to grips with international affairs like Scripture. We can only understand the total process of history in the light of the Bible. The very fact that in this ancient book, coming through such feeble and thoroughly human instruments, we have an adequate explanation of the things that are taking place in

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our own time, even though it was written many centuries ago, is a tremendous, powerful, compelling argument that this book is more than man's thinking.

Today many of God's children, like Timothy, are attacked by a subtle and devious philosophy that is attempting to undermine the authority of the Word of God, especially in matters of morality. The collapse of moral standards in major parts of human life can be traced directly to false concepts concerning Scripture. We need once again to hear the words of the apostle to his son in the faith, "*Remember the things which you have learned from childhood, these sacred writings which are able to establish you, to keep you, to thoroughly prepare you for every good work.*"

The choice that is left to us as Christians is simple; it is always the same in every generation: either we accept the Bible as God's word to us, his own revelation, his own explanation of the affairs of life and of human history, or, the only other alternative is that we must rest our faith on the shifting, complex, ever-changing authority of modern knowledge and human ability. It is either Christ or the critics, one or the other. One way leads to collapse; the other way brings us to illuminating insights into our own hearts, and into the processes of history and to the place of integrity and character.

Remember that the Son of God himself said,

"I come not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejects me and receives not my words has one who judges him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day," (John 12:47b-48)

That is because the Word of God is truth, it is reality, and the one characteristic that marks reality is that it does not change. Truth is always true. If it were true ten thousand years ago, it is still true today. That is why a two thousand year old book is as valid today as it ever was, because the truth is simply unchangeable. And truth is the final measuring stick of any civilization or of any individual life.