

2 Timothy No. 7**2 Timothy 3:10-17****August 4, 2013****The Rev. Dr. Robert S. Rayburn****Text Comment**

- v.10 The “You, however” or “but you” is one of five instances of that short phrase -- just two short words in Greek, *su de* -- in the two letters to Timothy. Timothy has not been and is not like the people Paul has been describing and must not be. The Scripture is, in effect, always addressing *us* this way: whatever may be true of others, of the culture around you, *you Christians must be different!* You are not to let the world squeeze you into its mold, [Stott, 92] This is an instance of biblical *antithesis*: the setting side by side of contraries. There is to be an obvious difference between us and the world, because there is a great difference between the people of God and the followers of the Devil. It’s a good question for all of us to ask ourselves from time to time: just *how am I* different from the unbelievers around me; how obvious to them is it that I am different *because I follow Jesus?* Go back over the description of the people of this world that Paul gave us in the opening verses of the chapter. Is it obvious to anyone who observes my life that I am not like that?
- v.11 Timothy has had a great deal of firsthand experience of how badly unashamed Christians can be treated, but has also seen how time after time the Lord delivered Paul from the hands of those who wished to destroy him and his work.

Now these first two verses can confuse Christian readers. They can sound as if Paul were boasting, calling attention to his own virtues; that the apostle was being immodest. But, remember, Paul is talking to someone who already knows this history, was an eyewitness of at least some of it. Paul mentions Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra because Timothy was from Lystra and likely could summon up images of Paul being stoned there and dragged out of the city and left for dead in the gutter of the road. What is more, Paul is hardly saying that he was sinless or that only he had lived such a life. In v. 12 he will say that what had happened to him would happen to many others and for the same reason. But his point is that Timothy must be prepared to face what Paul had faced and to live as Paul had lived and, in the final analysis, a faithful life that demonstrates the truth of the gospel is the gospel’s most powerful recommendation. Later at the end of Hebrews, if you remember, we will read that Timothy just got out of prison. So whether or not he had already, he was at least later to endure much of the same thing that Paul had endured.

- v.12 Our Savior, remember, said similar things. “A servant is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you.” [John 15:18-20] As Calvin explains Paul’s logic: “It is in vain to try to detach Christ from his cross, and it is only natural that the world should hate Christ even in his members. And since cruelty goes with hatred, persecutions come.” [327] Calvin goes on to say,

“But the question will be asked, whether all then must be martyrs. It is clear that there have been many godly men who have never undergone banishment or prison or sudden flight or any other kind of persecution. I answer that Satan has more than one way of persecuting Christ’s servants. But it is absolutely necessary that all of them should endure the hostility of the world in some form in order that their faith may be exercised and their constancy proved. Satan, who is Christ’s perpetual foe, never allows anyone a whole lifetime without disturbance, and there will always be wicked men to be thorns in our sides.”

Christians, of course, have avoided persecution by either withdrawing from the world so that the world is scarcely aware that they exist or by assimilating themselves to the world so that the world finds nothing in them to object to. But Paul is careful to say, “*all who desire to live a godly life* will be persecuted” and such a life, according to the teaching of the New Testament, is invariably a life *in* the world while not being a life *of* the world. We are not commanded to leave the world but to *stand firm!*

- v.13 Another reason Christians can count on persecution is that the enemies of their faith are constantly at work, refusing to make peace, determined to undermine our faith at every turn. It is a fact of life and of modern life: the advocates of those changes in our cultural life that move it further and further from a Christian base, both those in the world and those in the church, are relentless. They don’t give up. Believe me, when the gay marriage advocates have won the day, as it seems clear they will, they will not stop there. They will continue to advocate for still more sexual freedom and for the punishment of those who do not accept their agenda. And they will continue to use methods -- very effective methods -- that Christians can’t use. They can slander and demonize Christians, belittle our viewpoint, even lie about what we actually believe. You’ll notice, by the way, how little Paul is willing to credit such people with being sincere in their mistaken ideas, however common that has become in our day. Paul’s description of them here, “deceiving and being deceived” is insightful. As one commentator puts it, “they begin by being seducers and end in being dupes, and the dupes (very often) of their own deceptions; for deceit commonly leads to self-deceit.” [Plummer, 385, in Stott, 97] *That* is also something we are seeing a lot of nowadays!

- v.15 The most important reason why Timothy should remain faithful to the teaching of the Apostle Paul is that it is this teaching that is found in the Word of God. Sooner or later every doctrinal or ethical innovation that gets some traction in the church will be exposed as teaching that does not have the imprimatur of the Bible and that should be that for a Christian. True enough, every heretic has his texts, but to an honest reader of the Bible it will be clear that it is a text that is being wrenched out of its context, is being misused, or is being used to silence other biblical teaching. The reason Arianism did not prevail was finally because the church became convinced that it was *not* the teaching of the Bible. The same will be true of modern innovations that are being trumpeted as an advance over the traditional teaching of the church.
- v.16 What does Paul mean by “*all Scripture*”? It would seem, in context, to refer to the sacred writings of which mention was made in the previous verse. That would be the first 39 books of the Bible, what we call the Old Testament. Those 39 books would have made up the Bible of Lois and Eunice, the Scriptures Timothy had been taught in his childhood. The New Testament had not then appeared. *But as well* Paul seems also to be referring to the message that Timothy had learned from Paul, to which reference has been made in v. 10 and again in v. 14. That would, of course, be the message incorporated in Paul’s letters, the letters that make up a substantial part of the New Testament, letters with which Timothy was well familiar, having been present when Paul wrote some of them and, no doubt, being thoroughly familiar with the rest.

Paul never specifically refers to his writings as “Scripture,” though Peter does in 2 Pet. 3:16 in a very striking way, comparing them to what he calls “the other scriptures.” In other words, in our parlance Peter said that the writings of Paul belonged in the Bible! But Paul often in his letters speaks of writing with the authority of God or Christ, of communicating to others what God had revealed to him, of teaching what was taught him by the Holy Spirit, and so on. In a particularly striking instance of Paul’s own thought about the addition of new books to the existing Bible, in 1 Tim. 5:18 he combined a text from Deuteronomy (10:7) with a saying of Jesus recorded in Luke 10:7 and called both citations “scripture.” It seems clear that Paul both anticipated the addition to Holy Scripture of the books of the New Testament and that his letters would be among them. [cf. Mounce, 561-562, 564]

The fact that Paul says at the end of v. 15 that the “scriptures” are able to make you wise for salvation *through faith in Christ Jesus* indicates both that the gospel was taught in what we call the OT and opens the way for the entire story of Christ’s ministry, death, and resurrection eventually to be incorporated within the Bible. So, later, in 4:2, when Paul tells Timothy to preach *the word*, he surely includes *within that word* the story of

Christ as we have it in the Gospels and Acts and the explanation of it that we have in the rest of the NT. [Mounce, 565]

- v.17 Paul says two things here about the Bible: where it originated and what it is for. And what it is for is two-fold: to reveal the way of salvation in Christ Jesus and to instruct those who find salvation how to live their lives fruitfully in this world. As always in Paul, God saves sinners in order to renew them. In Titus 2:11-14 we read:

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”

As Paul says here in 2 Tim. 3, *that* is the message of the Bible together with practical instruction in good works. Faith in Christ and obedience to him are its subjects and they are always kept together in the Bible, creed *and* code of conduct, faith and love.

There is much to say about the teaching of these few verses. It is obviously immensely important that Paul should rest so much of Timothy’s confidence in his faith on the character of those who taught it to him. Parents, how solemn this teaching! *You must be the recommendation of the gospel and the entire truth of the Word of God to your children.* It is not enough that you teach them, you must adorn that teaching with the lives you live before them. What does Paul say? “Continue in what you have firmly believed knowing *from whom* you learned it...” Indeed, the way Paul puts it here, it seems that the character of those who taught Timothy and the fact that the teaching came from the Word of God are virtually equal reasons to believe that teaching to be true and for practicing it in one’s life. It is a challenge addressed to us all. We are recommendations of the truth of God and, accordingly, we will be either positive or negative recommendations. We will either be one of the best reasons for someone to believe the gospel and follow Jesus Christ or we’ll be one of the best reasons not to do so. Which is it to be in your life and in mine? We do not live to ourselves, much as we would like to. Our lives affect others profoundly. As Paul will put it in Titus, we are to *adorn* or beautify the gospel, the message of Jesus Christ before others.

Or we could speak at length about the content of the Bible as having these great purposes: to teach us the way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and to train us in the life of righteousness; to make us men and women of God and as such to equip us for every good work. It is remarkable how much difficulty the church has had through the ages trusting the Bible to teach us both things. Again and again Christians have been tempted to follow another message

about salvation and to teach another way of life than that found in the Word of God. It is happening today as it has happened in every day before. We are being told that by teachers *in the church* that all religions lead to God, or that anyone who is sincere in seeking whatever god he seeks, will be saved -- a stunning departure from the plain message of the Word of God from beginning to end -- and we are being told by such teachers that behavior the Bible condemns is, in fact, perfectly acceptable and behavior the Bible requires is not. We live in a so-called free country. Anyone can call himself or herself a Christian. But sooner or later the term must mean something or it will mean nothing. And presumably we find out what the term means *in the Bible*, in the history and its explanation we find in the Bible, where the Christian faith originated. Christianity is an account of how men may be saved and a message about how people should live.

But as this text, especially vv. 15-17 is *the* crux or locus classicus or most important biblical statement regarding the origin and the nature of the Bible, we should not pass it by without considering its teaching about Holy Scripture itself, fundamental as that is to everything for a Christian.

It is, after all, a question with immense implications for literally everything: What *is* the Bible? Well we start by reminding ourselves that “Bible” is not a biblical term. You will never find the word anywhere in the Bible. “Bible” simply means “book.” It came to be attached to Holy Scripture because it is the book of all books and so most deserves the name “book.” Actually the term “Bible” comes to us through Greek and Latin from *Byblos*, an ancient Phoenician city from which papyrus was exported. In the ancient world, as you may remember, writing was done on either clay tablets or papyrus. And books, or what were books in those days, were made of scrolls of papyrus. Papyrus was their “paper.” In any case, when we speak of “the Bible” we are speaking of “*the* Book.” But that is not the Bible’s own name for itself.

In the Bible itself, this collection of books is regularly referred to as “the Scripture” or “the Scriptures.” It is found in both the singular and plural. The use of the term “scripture” in the New Testament to refer to what we call today the Old Testament “was an inheritance, not an invention.” [Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 229] The idea of a body of sacred writings was handed down to Christianity from Judaism. The “holy scriptures” or “sacred writings” Paul referred to here are, as we said, writings we share with the Jews, the 39 books from Genesis to Malachi. The books that make up the New Testament were not yet circulating as a collection and some of them had not yet been written, though, as we said, Paul seems to make room for them here. The word “scripture” means simply something that has been written, a writing. That is much clearer in Paul’s Greek than in our English translation. We don’t use “scripture” in English very often for anything other than the Bible. But Paul uses one term for “scriptures” in v. 15 and a different term for “Scripture” in v. 16 and each was a word widely used in the language of that time for all kinds of writings and documents. But “holy scriptures”

obviously separates these writings from all others. The phrase refers to a particular body of writings and ones that are sacred. We might say that a simple definition of the Bible is then “sacred or holy writings.”

Paul then said that “All Scripture is God-breathed . . .” In the Vulgate Latin and in the KJV Paul’s word, *theopneustos* – a combination of the noun “God” and the adjective “breathed” – was translated as “inspired.” The Vulgate reads *Omnis scriptura inspirata est*. “All Scripture is inspired by God . . .” It is from that translation that we get the term “inspiration” as applied to the Bible. We speak of the doctrine of the divine inspiration of the Bible or we say that the Bible is divinely inspired. The problem with that translation is that “inspired” literally means “breathe in” or “breathe into” and so might suggest that the writings that make up the Bible existed already and God then breathed into them some special vitality or authority, something like when he breathed into Adam’s lifeless body the breath of life.

The great Princeton scholar, B.B. Warfield, changed everyone’s mind about the meaning of this hugely important word, a word that occurs only here in the New Testament and is never found in any Greek writing earlier than 2 Timothy. While it cannot be said to be likely, for all anyone knows for sure, Paul himself coined the term. Without going into all the detail Warfield proved that the form of the word means not “inspired” but “God-breathed,” the difference being that God didn’t breathe *into* the Scriptures but that he breathed the Scriptures out of his mouth. The Scriptures came out of God’s mouth; that is the burden of the term. For God to “breathe out” is simply for him to speak. The Bible is, in other words, God’s speech. It is interesting to note that the most authoritative lexicon or dictionary of New Testament Greek, the one that all students of the New Testament use [*BAGD*], lists only Warfield’s article on the word in the bibliography it provides in its article on this word, *theopneustos*. As one recent commentator wrote, “Warfield’s argument on this point seems to have been accepted nearly universally.” [Mounce, 566] This understand of the term comports very well with the literally thousands of times in which the Bible purports to record what the Lord *says* or what God *said*, or to be a record of the *word of the Lord*, or to be itself *the oracles of God* – that is the very words of God – or to describe its origin as “men speaking from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” [2 Pet. 1:21]

In other words, we might say that a simple definition of the Bible is then “*the Word [i.e. the Speech] of God written.*” A particularly powerful verification of that definition is the striking practice that we find in a number of places in the Bible when God himself and Holy Scripture are represented as *interchangeable*, that is, as if God were the Bible and as if the Bible were God. Take for example Galatians 3:8. There we read:

“The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’”

Now it wasn't the Scripture that made that great promise to Abraham; the Scripture had not yet been written. It was God himself who made that promise as anyone can prove by simply reading the opening verses of Genesis 12. But to say that God said something and that the Scripture says something is to say the same thing. Why? Because it is God who speaks in the Scripture; those writings, as it were, come out of his mouth. He is identified with the Bible because it is composed of his own words.

Another example of this phenomenon is found in Romans 9:17:

“For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: ‘I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.’”

Obviously it wasn't the Scripture that said that to Pharaoh – the Scripture did not exist at that time – but it was the Lord speaking through Moses. These statements could be attributed to Scripture only because of an entirely natural and habitual identification of the text of Scripture with God himself as speaking. One would say, “Scripture says...” when what was meant precisely was “God, as recorded in Scripture, says...” [Warfield, 299-300] What is more, though it was a man, Moses, who delivered the words to Pharaoh, those words were still ultimately and for all intents and purposes God's words. It is never a problem in the Bible that God spoke through various men. What mattered then and now was not that Moses said something or David or Jeremiah or Paul, but that what they said God had given them to say on his behalf.

So it is that in huge tracts of the Bible God is said to have spoken when, in fact, it was a man who spoke and who is recorded as having spoken in the Bible. Think of all the prophets and all that they said to Israel *as the word of the Lord*. Or, in the New Testament, take, for example, such a text as Hebrews 3:7.

“So as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...’ and there follows a citation from Psalm 95.”

But, of course, it wasn't God who wrote Psalm 95; it was David. In fact, in Hebrew 4:7 we read:

“Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before, ‘Today, if you hear his voice...’”

All three points are made here: David wrote Psalm 95, Psalm 95 is the Word of God, and God is still speaking through that psalm today! David's words were God's words and *they still are*. Or, as we read in Jeremiah 1:9, the Lord, in commissioning Jeremiah as his prophet, says, “Now, I have put *my* words in *your* mouth.” It is this use of human authors that gives the Bible so much of its interest, even its charm. Different men, in different times and places, under very different

circumstances were used by God to communicate his word to man and that gives Holy Scripture a universal quality, a universal relevance, and makes it utterly accessible to human beings.

To sum up, in the former set of texts “what Scripture says” is understood to mean “what God says;” here in this other sort of text, and there are a huge number of them, “what God says” is understood to mean “what the Scripture says.” Throughout the Bible there is an artless linguistic identification of God and the Bible. It matters not whether you say “God says something” or “the Scripture says something;” whether you say “Jeremiah said” or “David said” or “God said,” the meaning is the same in every case because the Scripture is the record of God’s words, however communicated to mankind. Don’t take that for granted. Any number of theologians in the twentieth century have, in one way or another, for one reason or another, warned Christians not to think that when they hold their Bible in their hands that they hold the word of God in their hands. But that is precisely what we are to think. It is precisely what the Bible says you hold in your hand: the very word, the speech of God himself written down. And you have only to think for a few moments to realize what an astonishing thing it is to say that and what a priceless gift we have been given.

What would you think, for example, if I were to tell you that I had been to heaven and had come back with a CD or MP3 recording of God himself speaking and telling people on earth what he felt was of first importance for them to know? What if I performed several miracles – such as Moses and Peter and Paul performed – by which to prove that I had in fact been to heaven and back and that I was actually in possession of recording of the voice of God himself. Would you not think it an extraordinary thing to be able to hear the voice of God? Would you not think it important beyond words to hear what he had to say? Well, you have the voice of God in your hand and you can learn precisely what the Maker of heaven and earth thinks it most important for you to know.

Or take the remark of Cornelius Van Til, longtime professor of apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary. “I have never seen my Lord Jesus Christ, but he has written me a letter.” [B15] Think of the Bible that way: as beginning Dear... and put your name after the “Dear...” A letter addressed *to you* from God himself. Would you not cherish a letter that came from God in heaven? Would that letter not become worn and tattered for all of your holding it, folding and unfolding it, showing it to others, pondering over every word, knowing who it was who wrote that letter and for what purpose he wrote it, that I might be saved and that I might live the life I should live, the life of true happiness and goodness while I am in this world? Might you not clutch that worn and tattered letter to your heart as you lay dying? But is that not precisely what the Bible is: God himself writing to us. Think how avidly a soldier on the battlefield opens and reads and reads again a letter that has come from his girlfriend or his wife back home. The Bible is also a love letter of a kind and should be read by us in the same way.

In his introduction to John Frame's splendid and important new book on the doctrine of Scripture, J.I. Packer wrote:

“As I was writing this foreword, I learned of a Chinese lady, a seventy-year-old watermelon grower named Jin, who said, ‘Reading the Bible is like having God talk to you.’”

Exactly! And that is the point with which Prof. Frame begins his book.

“The main contention of this volume is that God's speech to man is real speech. It is very much like one person speaking to another. God speaks so that we can understand him and respond appropriately. Appropriate responses are of many kinds: belief, obedience, affection, repentance, laughter, pain, sadness, and so on. God's speech is often propositional: God's conveying information to us. But it is far more than that. It includes all the features, functions, beauty, and richness of language that we see in human communication, and more. . . . My thesis is that God's word, in all its qualities and respects, is a personal communication from him to us.” [*The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 3]

Or, if I may summarize Prof. Frame's point: every time you open the Bible and read it, you are encountering God speaking to you. Sometimes, alas, you may not listen at all to what he is saying. At other times, you may struggle to understand what he means. But the best times are when you not only understand but respond appropriately to what he says: whether by sorrow and repentance, or by feeling encouraged and lifted up, or by realizing the truth of something you had forgotten, or by being inspired to live by faith or to practice love, and so on.

At their best, Christians have always been people who thought this way about the Bible, revered it for it being the very words of God, and opened it and read it and listened to it being preached with avid interest and personal engagement. For example, the members of John Wesley's little society at Oxford in the 1730s -- we would today call it a Bible study or small group -- were disparaged by their detractors as “Bible moths,” because they ate up the teaching of the Bible as moths eat wool clothes. [Packer, *Truth and Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life*, 147-148]. Well, are you a Bible moth? Listening, listening, listening to what God has to say.

Dr. Packer has described the nature of the Bible as akin to what is required to pass Britain's advanced driving test, a more demanding driving test that someone who has passed the standard test may volunteer to take. During the actual test, the driver must provide the examiner with a running commentary on what you intend to do, what changes you foresee coming as you drive along the road, why you are speeding up or slowing down, what dangers may appear and what you will do to avoid them and so on.

Well, says Dr. Packer, the Bible is like that. God is speaking throughout, telling us what has happened and why, what he is doing and why, what we should do about it and why, and what will come to pass in due time and what that means for us. [*Ibid*, 152-153] When you find yourself in the dark and don't know where to turn, you open the Bible and hear your heavenly Father telling you, "Come this way, my child." When you are confused and don't know what to think, you open the Bible and hear the Lord say, "The truth of the matter is this," my friend. When your heart is dull and lifeless, you open the Bible and hear the Lord say to you, "Don't forget these staggeringly wonderful things: my love for you, the sacrifice I made for you, and the future I have guaranteed to you."

That was Paul's doctrine of the Bible: it is the very speech of God written down to preserve it for us all. to us. That was Jesus' own view of the Bible. And it was Peter's as well. It is everywhere the Bible's view of the Bible. In fact, do you remember what Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:16-19? He was recollecting his experience with James and John when the Lord was transfigured before their eyes on that mountain in Galilee. "We were," he says, "eyewitnesses of his majesty." He reminds them of the voice of God that they heard at that time, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." He says, "We heard *that very voice* borne from heaven!" But then he goes on to say, "And we have something *more sure*, the prophetic word, to which you would do well to pay attention, as to a lamp shining in a dark place." They saw Jesus Christ with the glory of God upon him; they saw that with their own eyes. They heard the voice of God himself speaking from heaven. What we would give to have had that experience. But Peter says that the Bible is something more sure than even that, can be relied upon even more than such an unprecedented experience of God, and such overwhelming visual and aural evidence that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. That is how important and how wonderful the Bible is! That is why, though Peter, James and John were privileged to see Christ glorified, all of us have been given the Word of God.

We all can hear God speaking any time we want and talking to us about those things that are the most vitally important things in the world: how to be saved and how to live under God's smile.

Let me finish with this prayer of Archbishop Cranmer and the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*:

"Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ."