

Salvation according to scripture alone: 2 Timothy 3v14-17

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[0 : 00] 2 Timothy chapter 3, beginning at verse 14, and that's on page 1197 of the Church Bibles. 2 Timothy chapter 3, beginning at verse 14, on page 1197.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge. Preach the word and be prepared in season and out of season.

Correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

[1 : 25] They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

Thanks very much, Chris.

Well, let's pray together. The Lord says, These are the ones I look on with favour, those who are humble and contrite in spirit and who tremble at my word.

Father, we come to you in humility, with a contrite spirit.

We place ourselves under your authority, asking that your word and your truth would shape us, mould us, change us, as a church and as a people.

[3 : 09] Father, may that very word that brought life into existence be that same word that speaks to our hearts and lives today, bringing life and bringing truth.

Father, Father, without you and without you speaking, we are lost. we need you. We need your help.

Thank you for your word and for its truth to us today. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I was thinking during the week that it would be great to have a new church building.

Controversial, I know, but hey, wouldn't it be nice? Not just a smaller version of this community centre, but a modern, state-of-the-art building.

The problem is we don't have any money. So that got me thinking some more. So here's my idea I want to put to you.

[4 : 25] For a small fee, let's say 250 euro per person and at a bargain, 500 euro per family, we're going to offer to look after any births, deaths and marriages.

So if there's anybody in the community out there who's unsure about what they believe and just want to cover their bases in case, just in case, there is a God, we will baptise, we will bury, and we will bless.

Or hatch, match and dispatch, as they say. For a modest payment, we will assure them of salvation. They mightn't understand what they do, but we can say, it's all right, we have you covered.

And we can even put an announcement in the local newspaper. Carragoline Baptist Church, we have your life covered. So what do you think?

Well, I hope you would say something like this. Johnny, you really can't do that because that's not what the Bible says. Salvation is a free gift from God, received by faith in Jesus Christ.

[5 : 48] Well, if you think my idea is a little bit far-fetched, come with me back 500 years to the established church in Europe.

And something similar was happening. They needed a new church building. So the Pope at the time, Leo X, came up with this ingenious plan.

They were going to sell indulgences or pardons to the local people. Because at that time, most people believed in a place called purgatory.

It was kind of an in-between heaven and earth. It's a place of torment. A place where people went when they died. It's not in the Bible, but nevertheless, this is what the church taught.

And here people would go and they would have to work off all their sins before moving off into heaven. It was kind of a middle stage. And this was the genius of the idea.

[6 : 48] By selling these indulgences or pardons and people buying them with their hard-earned money, the Pope was giving them off time off purgatory.

He was basically accelerating the place from earth when you died to heaven. For a very small fee, salvation was being guaranteed to the people.

You could buy it with money. Now, at the same time, there was a young German monk, you may have heard of this guy, called Martin Luther.

And he was teaching in one of the church's seminaries. He was an up-and-coming theologian. And he was serious about reading the Bible. And as he began to lecture his students, he was teaching through Psalms and then Romans and then Galatians, he discovered something the church had never, ever taught him.

In fact, he was discovering that what the church taught wasn't what the Bible said. And he came to understand some really core truths.

[7 : 58] They weren't new, but they were rediscovered truths from the Bible. They could be summarised like this. That salvation is according to Scripture alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone, so it's a free gift, through faith alone, so not something we work for, but trust in Christ, for the glory of God alone.

So filled with this passion for this rediscovered truth and a concern for all these people who were being led astray. Martin Luther went down to his local church and he nailed up or stuck up on the church door 95 theses or, if you like, 95 mini-statements about the truth of the Gospel.

Because the local church door was like your town notice board. It's where people went to find out what was going on and what was happening. And his aim was to challenge the church and the leaders of the church to get back to the central truth of the Bible.

And this great event, which will be celebrated in October of this year, 500 years, has become known as the Reformation. Because it was a desire to reform the church in line with the teaching of Scripture.

Now we may be sitting here and thinking 500 years ago, I hate history. And that was an awful long time ago. I sympathise with you.

[9 : 42] I sat through history classes in school and I did not like it. But, there's lots that we can learn from it. And in one sense, 500 years later, we are still to be reformers.

So I want us to think of ourselves as being reformers. As we go back to the Bible, we are always being reformed. We are being shaped and changed by what the Bible teaches.

Or to put it another way, if we as a church are to go forward, if we're to be the kind of church that God calls us to be, if we're to be the kind of Christians God wants us to be, we are to first go back to Scripture.

We must take one step back to Scripture to be able to take steps forward. You see, what Martin Luther had rediscovered was not new.

And his desire to get back to the Bible was not new. It was something that the Apostle Paul took seriously and encouraged his fellow servant Timothy to do.

[10 : 54] So have a look in 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 14. 2 Timothy 3 verse 14. Verse 14, but as for you, so the Apostle Paul here is writing to this young pastor called Timothy.

He's somewhere about 16 or 18. and he was pastor or one of the elders of a church in Ephesus, a very, very young man.

And he's been given this responsibility of taking care of the church. Paul is nearing the end of his life and so he's passing on and he's encouraging to Timothy to start his ministry and to continue his ministry by getting back to Scripture.

So let's read verse 14. But as for you, Timothy, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of because you know from those from whom you've learned it.

So what has Timothy been learning? Well, look at verse 15. How from infancy, from a little child, you have known the Holy Scriptures. Timothy, you've started with the Scriptures.

[12 : 14] Chapter 1 tells us that it was his mother and grandmother that took the time to teach their young Timothy and that's an encouragement for us as parents if we've got children to be investing at the very early stages and teaching them the good news of God's Word.

So he started with this knowledge of the Scriptures and Paul is now saying continue on. Make the Bible central to your life and to your teaching and the reason look down at chapter 4 verse 3.

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine, they'll not put up with the truth of what Scripture teaches. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather round them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

So people don't want to hear what the Bible has to say but they want to hear what they want to hear. Verse 4, they will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

You see, just as there was in the time of Timothy, just as there was 500 years ago and it's still the same today, there will always be those who come to the church who will wander away from the truth of Scripture and lead other people away from the message of the Bible.

[13 : 44] They move away from God's revelation to man-made tradition and our job like a Timothy or a Martin Luther is to get back to what the Bible teaches.

You see, one of the most important questions we could always be asking ourselves is this, what does the Bible say? How are we made right with God?

Well, what does the Bible say? What should the church teach? What should we be doing as a church? Well, what does the Bible say? How are we to live as Christians in the world?

Well, what does the Bible teach? What determines my decision-making? What kind of church should I go to? Well, what does the Bible say?

It's not important what I think or what you think or what anybody else has to say, but what does Scripture have to say? What does it teach us?

[14 : 51] When Martin Luther was challenged and questioned about these rediscovered views, these truths about salvation and Scripture, he said this, your imperial majesty and your lordship demand a simple answer.

Here it is, plain and straight. Unless I am convicted of error by the Scriptures, I cannot and will not recant anything.

On this I take my stand. I can do no other. God help me. So he took his stand on Scripture alone and everything was lived and practiced under that.

So Scripture alone is where we must begin and where we must continue. There's three things we want to learn about Scripture and why it is so central and so important to us.

First, the source of Scripture. We start with Scripture because its origin or its source is not man or a church but God himself.

[16 : 05] So look at verse 16. 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16. There's a little phrase there. It says all Scripture is God breathed.

Now all Scripture implies both the Old Testament and the New Testament. So when we're talking of Scripture think old and new.

Let me give you an example of this. If you just go back a couple of pages to 1 Timothy chapter 5 verse 17. 1 Timothy chapter 5 verse 17.

So he's giving instructions to Timothy about elders. So chapter 3 he's been talking to the elders, the leaders of the church.

And one of the primary roles of an elder, he tells us in chapter 3, is that they must be able to teach. They must be able to teach God's word and apply God's word.

[17 : 08] And here he says something else. Chapter 5 verse 17. The elders who direct the affairs of the church so they give direction through the word. He says they are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

And now he wants to back up what he's saying. Verse 18. For the scripture says do not muzzle the ox while it's treading out the grain, which is a quote from Deuteronomy, the Old Testament.

So if the donkey or the horse or the ox gets some food, well then so should those who are doing the work of teaching. And then he says the worker deserves his wages, which is a quote from Luke's gospel, which is in the New Testament.

So can you see what Paul is doing? He's making a case and to make his case he refers to both the Old Testament and the New Testament and he calls them the scriptures.

So when we're talking about scriptures, we're talking about everything that's in the Old Testament and everything that's in the New Testament from Genesis to Revelation, the whole Bible.

[18 : 24] It's this book that we're looking at right now, nothing more and nothing less. And that must remain central to the life of the church. So all of scripture, we don't pick the pieces that we want and the bits we don't like we leave to one side.

We don't go, oh well this is what Jesus said, I can deal with that, but Paul said that so I don't listen to Paul because I don't like Paul. No, all of scripture, everything together is God's word because it is, secondly, God breathed.

So go back to 2 Timothy 3 verse 16. It says that all scripture is God breathed. Now God breathed is a technical term and it's really important that we understand it.

It simply means that the words, the Bible, originates in the mind of God. So every word written in the Bible has been chosen or has been inspired by God.

So the Bible is not man's invention, it's not the church's idea, but it is God's revealed truth to us. Again, if we go forward just a few pages to 2 Peter, so Hebrews after Timothy, Hebrews James, well there's a Titus in there as well, Titus, Hebrews, James and then 1 Peter, 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 20.

[20 : 01] 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 20. So we're thinking about what it is to be God breathed, that God's word originates in the mind of God, not in somebody's ideas.

So 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 20. So Peter is writing, he says, above all you must understand that no prophecy of scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.

For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

So what the authors had to say, the authors of scripture, it isn't their own ideas, their own imagination, but if you look at the end of verse 21, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

So as the work of God's Spirit was in their lives, so they began to write what God called them to write. Now another person who's just died recently, a few years ago, John Stott, explained it like this, which I think is very helpful.

[21 : 21] He said, God spoke his words through their words, using their different personalities and style in such a way that their words were simultaneously his.

So God didn't just dictate mechanically and go write this and then say a whole load of things and they just wrote down word for word, but God used their personalities.

That's why when we read Paul, he writes in a different way. Peter writes in a different way. Moses writes in a different way. God used their different personalities and style, but yet their words were at the same time God's words.

So we start with Scripture because the source of Scripture originates in the mind of God and it's for us today. The second reason why we need Scripture is its purpose.

And again, we see two things here. The purpose of Scripture first is it leads to our salvation. So go back to 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 15.

[22 : 37] Back to 2 Timothy 3 verse 15. So he says there, how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

So it leads people to salvation. If you were to summarize the whole of the Bible in one word, what would you use? If you were to summarize the whole Bible in one word, you ever thought what you would say?

Well, I think salvation would be a good word because the whole of Scripture from beginning to end is God's unfolding plan, his true story to save us from the judgment that we deserve.

The Bible tells us the story of what we're like, that God made us, that he loves us, that he rules over us, but we rebelled against him, we turned against God, we sinned, just like Adam and Eve, we've turned away from God, and we need saved from God's judgment, from his wrath, and that salvation comes not through our own efforts, not by the things I can do, but through the person of Jesus Christ.

So it says in verse 15, the scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

[24 : 14] So as we read and listen to scripture, it makes us wise for salvation, it shows us our need to be saved. Scripture itself doesn't save me, so if I read the Bible, it's not going to save me by itself.

Rather, the scriptures open up my eyes to help me see the need for Jesus. It brings me back to who Jesus is and shows me that Jesus died for me on the cross, that he rose again from the grave, defeating death, and as we trust in the person of Jesus, we are saved.

As it says at the end of verse 15, for salvation comes through faith in Christ Jesus. It's by trusting in him. Let me quote again, this time from a living author.

Tim Keller explains it like this, which I think is very, very helpful. The Bible, he says, then is not a collection of fables or fictional stories that give us insights on how to find God and live right.

Rather, it is both true history and a unified story about how God came to find us in the person of Jesus Christ, who died in our place so that we could be saved by grace through faith and live with him forever in a remade world, the garden city of God.

[25 : 42] The Bible is not primarily about us and what we should do. It is first and foremost about Jesus and what he has done.

So as we read through Scripture, we discover that God's great plan, it's all about pointing us to Jesus Christ and how he can save us and how he changes us.

So the first purpose of Scripture is to bring us to Jesus who can save us. The second purpose of Scripture is for our sanctification.

Sanctification is just simply a word to describe God's ongoing work in our lives to mature us and to grow us in our Christian faith.

And the way that God does this is through Scripture, through the Bible. So again, look at verse 16. All Scripture is God breathed, so it has its origin in God and it's for us, and it is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.

[26 : 55] us. So as we come to God's Word, we are to let God's Word filter into our minds. We're to let it have an effect in us.

Because the more we read God's Word, the more we listen to it, as we are told that we are taught by it. We're taught more about who God is, who Christ is, who the Spirit is.

We learn more about God, and how we should relate to Him. But we're also rebuked by it, verse 16. So as I begin to read the Bible and listen to it, then it shows me the areas in my life that need to be changed, the areas that don't fall in line with God's way.

And unless I read it, I'm not going to know that I need to change. It doesn't just rebuke us, but it corrects us. So it shows us the area we need to change, but it also corrects.

It shows us how we can be changed. It actually shows me how I can change to be more like Jesus through acts of repentance and faith and meeting together with one another and through prayer.

[28 : 10] But it doesn't just correct me, it trains me, trains in righteousness, builds up my understanding of the Bible so I can teach and encourage others.

But that's not just the job of the pastor or the elder. Each one of us should be trained up so that we can teach and encourage others. And the whole purpose for all of this, look at verse 17, so that the man of God and the woman of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

You see, scripture is the nutrients, the energy that we need to keep on growing as a Christian. Yesterday, I had a great day where I went walking up Caron 2 and along the way I needed to drink, as everybody does.

If we don't drink, you run out of water and you have no energy and you can't do anything. Well, imagine trying to climb a mountain without any water.

Or imagine trying to live just a few days without water. You'd maybe last, at best, two, three days maximum.

[29 : 33] But then what happens without water? Your organs begin to fail. They dry up, they shrivel up, and they stop functioning. And then you die very, very slowly.

But you do die. And the same is true that if we don't drink in God's word, if we're not being immersed in God's word, then the same effects will happen to us spiritually.

We will never mature. We will never grow. We will never become the people God calls us to be. We will slowly die as a Christian.

So let me ask the question. Are we people who are being immersed in God's word? When was the last time that you opened up the Bible to read it for yourself?

to hear God speaking to you? How he can change you? How he can shape you? How he can build you up?

[30 : 37] If you find reading difficult, when was the last time you heard it on audio? Just hearing what God is saying to us. Without it, we die.

We never grow, we never mature. We're just like little toddlers, never being the people God calls us to be. So God gives us the gift of his word to bring us, to make us aware of our need of salvation, to bring us to Christ.

But not just to bring us to Christ, to grow us to be more like Christ. And he does that through his word. So, if we have the source of scripture, which is God, the purpose, which is for our salvation and our sanctification, what's our response to scripture?

How should we be responding as God's people to his word? Well, let me give you three areas that I think it should really affect us and shape us as a church and as individuals.

First, in the area of authority. Scripture alone doesn't mean that we can't read other people's writings.

[32 : 02] We've already listened to some of them today by listening to what Martin Luther said or John Stott or Tim Keller. It doesn't mean that we can't read what anybody else says.

It doesn't mean to say we can't listen to other preachers or teachers or have our own opinions. It simply means that everything we listen to, everything that we read, must come under the authority of scripture.

In other words, what we teach as a church, what we practice as a church, must be ruled by scripture. And the problem at the time of the Reformation 500 years ago was the church as an institution had become the authority.

authority. So what the church leader said was equal in authority to what scripture said. So if the church leader said this, well it was to be taken as if God had spoken.

They didn't submit themselves to God's word. Rather the people had to submit to man's word. They followed tradition instead of God's revelation.

[33 : 12] revelation. And the same kind of things can happen to us today if we are not careful. It's not only wrong to do it but it's extremely dangerous because it leads people away from Christ and away from God's truth.

We don't want to be following man-made traditions. We want to follow God's revelation. That is our authority. And this was something that Timothy had to watch out for.

If you go back to 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 17 as Paul is writing to this young pastor leader he's encouraging him to get back to scripture and to be aware that there will be those who go away from scripture.

So verse 17 he says their teaching will spread like gangrene. It's infectious. It's poisonous. It's going to do damage to people.

Among them were Hymenaeus and Philetus. Two people who were in the church who were teaching things they ought not to. Verse 18 they wandered away from the truth.

[34 : 22] They were teaching traditions rather than God's revelation. So as a church we need to seek to submit to God's authority.

Everything we say everything we do must come under God's word. So it's not the authority of the pastor. It's not the authority of our statement of belief.

It's not the authority of our church constitution and all those things may be good and proper but everything must come under the authority of scripture.

So let me challenge you and encourage you. As you listen to me or to whoever else may be preaching, as you observe what we practice and what we do as a church, do you just listen and go yeah that's fine, oh we'll do this, that's fine.

How do you know it's fine? You might be listening here right now and you haven't even got a Bible with you and you're thinking oh yeah except that, how do you know? How do you know it's true? It's your job, your responsibility, your role to look to scripture and say is this what the Bible says?

[35 : 32] Is what we are practicing what the Bible teaches? So first, it must be our authority.

Second, it's sufficient. Scripture, the Bible, is God's revelation of himself. This is how we get to know God because God has revealed himself to us through his word and it's complete.

Everything that God has to say about us today is in God's word. It's complete. It's sufficient. God didn't leave us speculating about what we should believe or how we should behave as Christians.

It is a clear word to us today. That means we don't need a further word or we don't need more revelation. We don't need somebody writing in new books or coming up with new ideas and say, did you know this about God?

You never heard about this. No, what we have in God's word is sufficient. John Calvin was another man similar to Martin Luther who was seeking to reform the church, to bring it back to scripture.

[36 : 48] He was working in France and he stood against those who sought to add to scripture. And this is what he said, which I think is helpful. let this then be a sure axiom.

Let this be the standard by which we measure everything. That nothing ought to be admitted in the church as the word of God, save that which is contained first in the law and the prophets, which refers to the Old Testament, and secondly to the writings of the ten apostles, which refers to the authors of the New Testament.

And that there be no other method of teaching in the church than according to the prescribed rule of his word. And that message is the same message for us today.

We shouldn't allow in any other teaching or any other ideas except that which is contained within scripture. Now today you might go to some churches and they'll say things, well, we have the Bible, but that's not enough, that's not sufficient.

There's still more things we need to hear from God. So they'll say something like this, God told me, or God has said. So rather than rely on what God has said about himself in the Bible, people depend on their own thoughts and imaginations.

[38 : 21] Because the only way that we can know if God has told us anything and we can be sure that it's God speaking to us, is what God has already said in scripture.

This is what Timothy, again, was told to look out for. Go back to chapter 4, verse 3. 2 Timothy 4, verse 3. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine.

They go, well, we can invent our own ideas and traditions. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths, to man-made traditions. And all that will do is lead people into all kinds of confusion about who God is and what we should do as a church.

We don't decide what we do as a church according to what I feel or what I like. It's not about my preference or your preference. It's about what does the Bible teach us?

[39 : 32] What has God revealed about himself? We don't need any more extra revelation. It is sufficient. And then third, we come to Scripture not like any other book, but as it is, the Word of God.

We read God's Word, we listen to it explained and applied. We do not sit above it, but we simply come and live under it.

If you've ever been to a traditional church building, not like this, you'll probably find that when you go into some of the old buildings, you'll find that there's a great big pulpit away up high.

Have you ever seen that great big wooden thing? And there the minister would walk up all these stairs and he would sit up at the top and the congregation would be down below somewhere. Well, apart from it being odd to us, there was a purpose in it.

It was supposed to symbolise that the Word had an authority and the people were sitting under the authority of God's Word. And we come here today, we're on the same plane, the same level here, but all of us together are under the authority of God's Word and we must approach it with humility.

[40 : 54] Isaiah 66 verse 12, this is how we opened up with this prayer this morning. God says, Isaiah 66 verse 12, these are the ones I look on with favour, those who are humble and contrite in spirit and who tremble at my word.

Yeah, we can wrestle with it, we can ask our questions and we can struggle over it, we can come to home groups where we try to work out how does this apply, what does it mean?

But at the end of the day, in faith, we simply humbly obey, trusting that what our creator God says is good and right and is best for us.

It's not my opinion, it's not what I feel or what I think, but what God is saying to us. Another reformer, this time this guy Ulrich Zwingli, who was working in Switzerland, he put it like this, he wrote a lot about God's word, he said, the word of God is certain and can never fail, it is clear and will never leave us in darkness, it teaches its own truth, it arises and irradiates the soul of man with full salvation and grace, it gives the soul sure comfort in God, it humbles it, so that it loses and indeed condemns itself and lays hold of God.

This is what scripture should do, bring us to a place of humility and say, Lord, your will be done in my life, let your word take centre place, let me live according to it and give me the grace and give me the power of your spirit to obey and do what it says.

[42 : 56] Salvation is according to scripture alone. We would never know anything of God's salvation if God did not reveal it to us in his words.

We would never know anything about Jesus, what it is to grow in him, how we should live and how we should behave as a church unless God spoke. This is God's message alive to us today to change us and make us more like him.

So let's together, in humility, live under his word. Let's pray together. Amen.