

Scripture: proof and reproof

Introduction

Whenever you listen to a sermon from a modern church, perhaps on TBN, you notice that the purpose and intent is far from what Bible expositions were about in history. Throughout church history great men of God expounded the truths of Scripture in order to instruct people and apply God's word to their practical experience. Today, preaching is motivational, just like some sports coach in the locker room or some psychological counsellor.

Modern preaching is about promoting self-esteem, 'empowering' people for miracle working, pandering to people's weaknesses and foibles, denying their sins, and giving people a 'leg-up'. It is the very opposite of what historic preaching used to be, which often included: affirming the need for self-denial, exposing sins and demanding confession of them, slaying arrogance, insisting on mortification, and so on.

In short, modern leaders appear to not know what the Bible is for.

The Bible is so full of amazing things that an unscrupulous person can preach almost anything with reference to it, which is what happens in churches today. People highlight a certain Bible passage, often a historical narrative, and then make it seem to teach whatever nonsense is the hobby-horse of the preacher.

This is not expounding Scripture.

The art of Bible teaching (in fact not 'preaching' at all),¹ is allowing Scripture to speak for itself and shining a light on truths that are found there; then applying them to the human conscience.

Thus when the Bible itself tells us about the purpose of Scripture it uses terms that do not describe how modern preaching works at all. Let us examine this.

¹ In the NT preaching is reserved for proclaiming the Gospel to outsiders. It was a common means of entertainment in market places to preach or debate; the early apostles and evangelists slotted into this factor with Gospel preaching. In church, teaching involves dialogue, discussion, questions and answers. It is not an entertaining solo piece of bravado.

The purpose of Scripture

From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for 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 complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. **2 Tim 3:15-17**

Introduction

These are the main Bible verses which declare the purpose of God's word in our lives. You should note that of the items listed, two are about doctrinal instruction and two are about correction and conviction.

God's view of the teaching ministry of expounding Scripture in the church is mostly about correction and instruction. Instruction involves didactic teaching (proof about truth) and apologetics (proofs in defence of the faith). Correction is applying truth to the conscience for admonition and changed behaviour.

Now this is the opposite of what passes for teaching in many churches where doctrinal instruction is not only ignored but sometimes actively denounced; being dogmatic is considered sinful but dogma is just another word for authoritative truth. Also, where churches have taken on board the toleration prevalent in the world, correction is not much of a church issue either since all sorts of behaviour and attitudes are accepted as norms. Admonishment has virtually ceased to exist in modern churches where erroneous doctrines of antinomianism have taken hold (such as suggesting that believers are never guilty).

Neither is teaching ministry just about encouragement; it is about whatever is necessary at that time: instruction, education, correction, reproof, and even condemnation (of errors and heretics).

There should be a great deal of encouragement and exhortation within the church from many ministering members; there is always encouragement in the church. But this is not the prime focus of the teaching ministry of elders; they are to instruct and correct.

Teaching God's word is not an entertainment once a week; it is an ongoing education so that we function as we should.

The Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation

In this case 'holy' is *hieros* meaning: sacred, consecrated to deity. 'Scriptures' is *gramma* meaning a writing, a letter, a document.

The Scriptures are sacred writings (that is the English definition) and should be treated with reverence and respect. This means not ignoring them or mistreating them by twisting what they say and perverting them by our own sinful ideas.

All wrong doctrines are blasphemous because they take a sacred word and pervert it into a wrong meaning. People who twist God's word will face perdition on the Day of Judgment. It is a fearful thing to corrupt God's word.

The beauty of God's word is that it makes us wise for salvation. Surely all those who have been converted by God's grace in Christ want to learn more and more about what this salvation means? There is no other way to find out other than by studying Scripture.

All those who ignore the Bible and fail to ardently study it will be fools regarding salvation. They will be even bigger fools if as well as ignoring Scripture instead they fully accept the words of men that pervert the Scriptures.

Through faith which is in Christ Jesus

The word brings us to faith and enables us to see Christ. Salvation is by the gift of faith placed in Christ as Saviour and Lord and the means of this is Scripture, 'faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God' (Rm 10:17).

But it doesn't stop here but it is merely the beginning of a journey of faith. The more we understand Scripture, the more our faith is developed and strengthened and the more we know about Jesus. As we grow in faith and knowledge of Christ we grow in wisdom about salvation.

It is impossible to grow in faith and the wisdom of salvation if you do not study the Bible.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God

This is the great explanation of the origin of the Scriptures. God's word comes via men that were inspired (out-breathed) by God. God breathed out into men to mould their thoughts and stimulate them to write those thoughts down in the right words. Thus the Bible is the result of the out-breathing of God. Though men were intermediaries, the Scriptures were inspired by God and represent his thoughts.

Since this is the case, we cannot demean, deny or minimise the value of any verse, word or passage of Scripture. All those who do this commit blasphemy since the Bible is God's word.

What Scripture is profitable for

Scripture is profitable for doctrine

'Doctrine' is *didaskalia* meaning: teaching, instruction, doctrine and precepts.

Doctrine is the first thing that Paul considers when talking about God's word. Doctrine is vital in the church. If there is poor teaching, or no teaching, in the church then the people are starved, weak and useless. They do not grow and cannot function as they should.

Doctrine is the exposition of truth and truth is what gives us freedom, power, knowledge, wisdom and understanding of God's will. Primarily, doctrine is about knowing God and understanding his decree, will and attributes. If you understand the truth about God, all other doctrines flow into place. Very many heresies stem from a lack of understanding God's character.

For example, Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, Governmental Theory and Arminianism, deny the eternity and sovereignty of God's decree of salvation. Arianism, Christadelphianism, Oneness Pentecostals, Socinians and Unitarians deny the Trinity.

Without studying Scripture we will never be able to learn about God. The Bible is vital for doctrinal instruction.

Scripture is profitable for reproof

'Reproof' is *elegchos*, meaning: a proof, that by which a thing is proved or tested, conviction.

This statement has two edges. Firstly, it means that Scripture gives us proofs to explain everything. God's word tests everything and gives us God's verdict on it. Thus, for example, the modern law that homosexuals are favoured by God and can marry is tested by God's word and found to be false.²

Whatever we wish to understand, God's word will help us get to the truth of the matter. For those things it does not directly address, it gives us principles by which we may discern the truth by deduction.

Secondly, it refers to the application of proof to give a conviction of something. Having proved or tested a thing we are then convicted and that may mean a reproof. If convicted that we are wrong on something, then that truth reproves us and demands changing our views.

Scripture is profitable for correction

'Correction' is *epanorthosis* meaning: restoration to an upright or right state, correction, improvement of life or character.

We are weak and sinful people and thus in constant need of correction. It is God's word that provides this correction. How do we grow in grace? It is by the application of the word of God to our conscience by the Holy Spirit in the process of sanctification. As we correct failings, we understand how to live better. This leads us to the next point.

Scripture is profitable for instruction in righteousness

'Righteousness' is *dikaiosune*, meaning: righteousness, the condition acceptable to God, integrity, virtue, purity of life, rightness, correctness of thinking feeling and acting.

Righteousness is not an automatic matter; we don't just become practically righteous by faith³ or by some experience.⁴ Definitive or positional sanctification (our standing in heaven) is a once for all transfer of Christ's righteousness to us in heavenly places so that we can approach God with boldness,⁵ but progressive sanctification is by stages of education, and that education is by the Holy Spirit applying truth to us.⁶ This is instruction in righteousness.

Practical righteousness, progressive sanctification, is by instruction, by training and this involves Scripture.

The goal of Scripture teaching

That the man of God may be complete

'Complete' is *artios* meaning: fitted, complete, perfect.

The aim of sanctification is to make us a perfect man like Christ (Eph 4:13). Now this perfection is not attainable in this age but we still strive for it (see Paul's argument in Phil 3). All the training of the Holy Spirit in applying God's truth to us is so that we may become mature men in Christ.

² Lev 18:22, 20:13; Rm 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10; Jude 1:7.

³ As in the teachings of some Higher Life writers.

⁴ As in Wesleyan perfectionism and many Charismatic teachers.

⁵ 1 Cor 6:11, 'you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God'. 1 Cor 1:2, 'to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints'.

⁶ Heb 2:11, 'those who are being sanctified'.

That the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work

'Equipped' is *exartizo* meaning: thoroughly furnished, to complete, finish, to furnish perfectly, to accomplish.

Part of this maturity is being equipped for every good work. When you have been trained by God's word then you become able to deal with every situation placed in front of you because you are equipped.

It is like a soldier that is not only trained to fight but is furnished with every necessary piece of armour to fight. A trained soldier is useless without weapons and armour. God's word gives us what we need to function properly.

Conclusion

I am appalled today to see supposed Christians going to church without a Bible or to discover that some do not even have a Bible. Others rarely read it. Very many people don't read their Bible but use daily readings by men instead; this is tragic. How can you limit yourself to verses chosen by a mere man? How can you study the Bible at all?

The Bible is God's word, it is Scripture, and it is absolutely vital for a believer to grow in righteousness, faith and power. The more you study Scripture the more you find great spiritual treasure. It is a daily voyage of discovery searching out God's truths.

The men in history that revered God's word and determined to study it were those that changed entire nations, and some changed the entire world.

It was a reverence for, and a determination to study, God's word that made Martin Luther go against the whole world and argue that justification is by faith and not works. This changed the world and human history. It was obedience to God's word that made Athanasius fight against Arianism and defend the truth of the Trinity, enshrined in the Nicene Creed, despite having nearly everyone against him and being banished five times and live in hiding. It was Calvin's systematisation of Bible truths that formulated Protestantism and led to the developed western world. It was the preaching of the Biblical Gospel by pioneer missionaries that led primitive, backward countries to emerge and develop.⁷

I cannot stress enough how important it is to study God's word. Merely reading it is not enough, you need to actively study it. You don't have to be an academic to do this; you merely study it to the best of your ability. Even just taking notes after reading passages would be a good start.

The Bible is God's inspired and holy word given to men by out-breathing. It makes us wise for salvation and without it we cannot learn what this salvation is. It is profitable to teach us doctrine, to prove what is true, to correct our failings, and to instruct us in practical righteousness. By studying God's word we will become complete, perfected, mature and equipped for every good work.

Thank God for the gift of his holy word to us.

⁷ Just two examples: if missionaries had not gone to India women would still be thrown on funeral pyres with their dead husbands (suttee). It was the Gospel that changed certain primitive tribes from being cannibals.

Do not be satisfied with preaching by men that is not Bible-based, that is not true, that is not doctrinal, that is not instructive in wisdom. Don't listen to preachers who fail to expound God's word and instead pass on all sorts of agendas, philosophies and fashionable isms. Don't be satisfied with preaching that is merely topical, humorous, superficial and irreverent. Find yourself men who will teach you what the Bible says and prove it to be true by sound arguments and clear references. Learn truth.

Above all, study it yourself and do all you can to understand it. Then obey what you have learned.

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