

## THOROUGHLY EQUIPPED

Readings: Deuteronomy 4:1-14, Revelation 22:7-21

Belgic Confession Art 7

Text: 2 Timothy 3:15-17

Theme: The Bible is God's inspired word and is sufficient for our doctrine and life.

Purpose: To urge you to read the Bible as a sufficient guide for salvation in Christ and complete Christian living.

All through history soldiers who have gone into battle have had to be thoroughly equipped for warfare. Some have not always been well prepared and those who went into battle without the right equipment have often lost their lives.

The Roman soldiers of the Roman Empire were equipped with a sword and shield, a helmet, a breastplate, and strong sandals for their feet. Many also carried a long spear.

Modern soldiers are given with sophisticated gear – strong boots and helmets, the latest rifles, camouflage clothing, high-tech communications equipment, a computer, a GPS system, infra-red goggles to see at night - you name it and they have it! Warfare is a dangerous occupation and they need to be well equipped.

The Christian also needs to be thoroughly equipped for the spiritual battle we are engaged in and for doing every good work God calls us to do. God equips us with his spiritual armour (Eph 6). The primary offensive weapon we have in this battle is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. In these verses to Timothy Paul describes how all Scripture thoroughly equips the man of God for every good work.

We will consider:

1. The Bible's Authority
2. Its Usefulness
3. Its Purpose

### 1. ITS AUTHORITY

a. The authority of the Bible is based on its **origin**. It has authority because it is the word of God. The apostle Paul wrote, "All Scripture is God-breathed".

A number of other translations use the word "inspired" which means to breathe in. The NIV literally translates the Greek word as "God-breathed". These are the very words of God, which he has breathed out.

When we say the Bible is inspired or God-breathed we mean that God guided the writers of the Bible, through His Holy Spirit, so that they wrote down exactly what he wanted them to write. The apostle Peter describes how the biblical writers were "carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). Each writer used his own style and expressions, but he was directed by the Spirit so that he wrote down God's words. So the Bible has authority because it originates from God.

**b. The scope** of this authority covers the entire Bible - "All Scripture is God-breathed"; not just some of it but all of it - every part, every word, every detail.

When Paul wrote this he was referring primarily to the Old Testament, which the Jews accepted as the Scriptures.

But he also regarded his own letters as having that authority.

To the church in Corinth he wrote, "If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command" (1 Cor 14:37).

And the apostle Peter regarded Paul's writings as part of the Scriptures (2 Peter 3:16).

Over a period of time the church came to recognise this library of 66 books as making up the canon of Scripture, the Bible.

**c. This book is sufficient** for faith and life.

It does not teach us everything about everything but it does teach us all we need to know in order to be saved and live in obedience to God.

This is clearly taught in this verse and in other parts of the Bible (Rev 22:18f) and is clearly spelled out in Article 7 of the Belgic Confession.

That means that the traditions and decisions of the pope or the church councils and synods do not have the same authority as the Bible. When Martin Luther was on trial before Emperor Charles V he said that he did not trust "in popes or councils, since they had often erred and contradicted themselves". Those are merely the writings of men.

This also rules out "new revelations of the Spirit" (WCF I.vi). Through the history of the church some men and women have claimed that God has spoken to them directly. This claim is made by some Pentecostal Christians today. But we do not need any new revelations, nor should we seek them, because all we need to know is recorded here in the Bible.

This doesn't rule out creeds and confessions and books. Some Christians maintain they want "No creed but the Bible!" That is simplistic. Much has been said and written and preached about the Bible. Thousands of fine and helpful books have been written about this book - commentaries, theologies, explanations and applications of doctrine and practical Christian living – all books we can read with profit.

But the best book to read is the Bible - it is the final authority, the absolute standard, the last word. It gives us all we need to know in order to be saved and to live holy lives.

Martin Luther declared to Charles V; "Unless I am convinced by Scripture and by right reason...I am bound by the texts of the Bible; my conscience is captive to the word of God." May that be true of each one of us!

## 2. ITS USEFULNESS

The Apostle Paul tells us that the Scriptures are "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." These four words can be divided into two groups of two. The first two refer to our creed.

**a. Our creed** is what we believe.

i. The Bible is useful for **teaching**.

It teaches us about God creating the world, the fall into sin and God's plan of salvation. It teaches us about God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; about grace and gratitude. It is a manual for teaching. This is important because if you don't *think* right you can't *live* right. What you *believe* will determine how you *behave*.

ii. The Bible is also useful for **rebuking**. This is the negative side of teaching. The word of God teaches the truth and it refutes error; it spells out what is true and exposes what is false.

Sadly, many people in the wider church get very little teaching and so are easily persuaded by errors. They are carried away by the latest theological fad, the current thinking, the popular emphasis. This happens because they are lightweight in their faith and superficial in their knowledge.

Paul wrote this to Timothy who was a pastor in a church. He needed to know the Bible for teaching and rebuking. So do I. So do you!

The Puritans in New England had one of the highest literacy rates ever achieved in any community in history. They taught their children to read so all of them could read the Bible.

Most of you can read. Are you putting that ability to good use in reading the Bible?

Are you reading it regularly and systematically? Do you read the whole Bible, not just parts of it? Do you memorise it and meditate on it? Does it shape your creed, what you believe?

**b. Our conduct**, that is, how we live.

i. The Bible "corrects" us. Most of us have had this experience of reading the Bible and it exposing your sin. It is especially the law of God that does this. It is like a mirror; it shows you what you look like; it shows you up, warts and all. It convicts us and shows us how we fail God, our family, our church. The Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to correct us, to reform us, and to straighten us up.

ii. And he uses the Bible for "training in righteousness". The word used for train is used for the instruction of children. When we train children we guide them, lead them, direct them. Through the Bible God directs us in right living.

Many of you are working in various areas of society. As part of your work you need to do ongoing study and training - professional development, or some other on the job training. You attend seminars and courses, read books and papers, maybe even pursue a further degree.

Are you applying that same effort in developing as a Christian? Are you attending the Bible studies of the church? Are you making use of seminars and conferences? Are you reading and studying the Bible so that it may correct your sins and train you in righteousness?

We have considered the Bible's authority and its usefulness.

**3. ITS PURPOSE.** Paul expresses two purposes:

**a. The Bible was written for the purpose of making us "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." (vs 15b).**

It was not written as a textbook of history, nor as a manual on biology, nor as a reference book for science. It was written to tell us how to know God, how we can be saved and how we can have eternal life.

This message is very clear in the Bible. The reformers often spoke about the clarity of the Scriptures. They didn't mean that every passage was easy to understand, rather that the main message was clear - the message of salvation in and through Jesus.

The apostle John concluded his gospel; "...these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

Jesus is the central character, the key player, the main actor in this whole drama of the Bible. Everything in the Old Testament points forward to him; everything in the New Testament is based on him. So when you read the Bible keep looking out for Jesus.

Spurgeon expressed this in his usual delightful manner when he gave this advice to a young preacher: "Don't you know, young man, that from every town and every village and every hamlet in England, wherever it may be, there is a road to London? So from every text in Scripture there is a road towards the great metropolis, Christ.... I have never found a text that had not got a road to Christ in it, and if I ever do find one.... I will go over hedge and ditch but I would get at my Master, for a sermon cannot do any good unless there is a savour of Christ in it." (Quoted by B Chappel, *Christ Centred Preaching*, p 280). Every sermon must point you to Christ and your own reading of the Bible must lead you to him "for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

In verse 15 Paul wrote to Timothy, "... from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

Timothy had learned about the way of salvation from a very young age.

Many of us here have had that same privilege. We have grown up in Christian homes; we had heard about the Lord Jesus from the Bible from as young as we can remember. Don't waste that privilege. I say that especially to the children and young people. Appreciate this great blessing you have and make good use of it. May the Scriptures make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. This is why the Bible was written.

**b. But there is a further purpose: "so that the man of God may be **thoroughly equipped for every good work.**"**

There is much more to being a Christian than just believing in Jesus and coming to church on Sunday. God wants you to use the Scriptures so that you will grow and develop.

Parents want to see their children grow up.

Teachers want their pupils to develop in understanding.

Employers want to see their workers become more skilled and useful.

In the same way God wants to see us become thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The Greek word translated as "thoroughly equipped" was used of boats and wagons that were fully supplied with everything they needed.

If you go to a luxury hotel the room will be fully furnished with everything that you need, (and perhaps don't need!), for a night away.

Earlier we saw how the modern soldier is fully equipped with all he needs for battle.

In the same way you, as a Christian, need to be fully supplied with all you need in this spiritual battle. You are fighting against the world, the flesh and the devil. You are a soldier in the world's most dangerous war. The word of God can give you all you need to be "thoroughly equipped", to be well armed, well prepared for warfare.

This book is the Word of God, inspired, God-breathed.

It is sufficient to guide and direct your doctrine and your life.

It was written so that you may be saved through faith in Jesus Christ and so that you may be thoroughly equipped to serve him in every good work.

Be sure you use it for these great purposes!

Amen