

REFORMATION500 SERMON SERIES

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REFORMATION500 - BIBLE ALONE

2 Timothy

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What is the highest selling book but the least read? A National Church Life Survey revealed that a large proportion of Christians don't read their Bibles. Why does that happen? It could be the Bible has become too familiar. We think we know it but don't really. Like the children who said the fifth commandment is 'Humour your father and mother.' And the seventh commandment is: 'You shall not admit adultery.' For others, the Bible is too unfamiliar. Who can read those strange names, or work out all that ancient history. It maybe we feel the Bible doesn't seem relevant in our day and age. Another reason could be the Bible is too powerful. When we read the Bible, we approach God in his Word. He tells us things that are so important we should respond to. We should obey what we read. There are things we like to keep doing that God speaks against. There are things we should do we'd rather not be reminded of.

The Bible is God's Word. It is powerful. It is authoritative. It is "God breathed" says Paul to Timothy. Paul is giving a strong word to Timothy that basically comes down to this: 'Stick with the Word'. Note 2 Timothy 3:14: "But as for you, continue in what you have learned..." The context here is that Paul's second letter to Timothy is the last one he wrote before he died. So, at the end of his life he is saying: I want to pass on what is of utmost importance: 'Stay with the Bible'.

In our Reformation 500 series we are looking at the key ideas of the Protestant Reformation which started in 1517. Today we will focus on the idea of the 'Bible alone'. The Englishman, William Tyndale, is a significant figure who in 1526 completed translating the first English New Testament.

What is the point of emphasising the Bible alone? The background here is for 1500 years the Roman Catholic Church had developed the doctrine that there were two sources of truth. One is the Bible and the other is the church's 'Tradition'. This Tradition is the message of the apostles that was not written down. It was passed from one generation to the next. The official status of the apostles was passed onto the Pope. That means whatever the pope says officially is 'infallible'. It therefore has authority like the Bible. Now it is against this Tradition of the church that the Reformers said a great

big 'No! We only accept the Bible and not tradition as well'. In 1521 at the historic interrogation of Martin Luther at the Diet (parliament) of Worms, he declared his conscience to be captive to the Word of God saying: 'Unless I am overcome with testimonies from Scripture...- for I believe neither the Pope nor the Councils, since they have often erred and contradicted one another- ... my conscience is bound by God's Word.'

Now the key reason for emphasising the 'Bible alone' is because of Luther's rediscovery of the gospel in the Bible. That is, we are justified through faith alone. Going back to the Bible and realising what it really said is what gave rise to the Reformation. The teaching of the Roman Catholic Tradition was stifling and suffocating the gospel. Listen to this from the Catholic Catechism 'Confession takes away all sins committed after baptism. But it does not take away all the debt due to God for sins. By the works of our good Christian life we help to pay that debt, by the offering of the Mass, by prayer, by self denial, by sufferings and disappointments patiently borne. The church too helps our debt... through the indulgences paid for ourselves and for the souls in purgatory'. You won't find any of this talk of indulgences and purgatory in the Bible. It is based on Tradition. Given what the church taught was regarded as 'infallible,' the ordinary churchgoer of the time just accepted what the priest said. They never looked at the Bible. In fact, they would not have had a Bible. They couldn't read anyway.

Here we see the providence of God. At about the time Luther was rediscovering the gospel of justification by faith, the printing press was invented. It meant that for the first time ever people could afford to have their own Bible. One of the key things each Reformer did was to translate the Bible into their own language. People were taught to read using the Bible as their first text book. It meant they could read for themselves what God had done through Jesus. For so long they had been struggling with having done enough good works to pay their debt for sin. Now they could discover that through faith all is forgiven. With the emphasis on the Bible alone, church services changed from a focus on the Mass in Latin to preaching the Word in the people's language.

That is the emphasis we see with Paul as well as he gives his final words to Timothy. Note 4:2 "Preach the Word! Be prepared in season and out of season". The reason why Paul stressed that was as he said in 3:15 "The Holy Scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus". The Bible is inspired by God and, as Isaiah puts it, (Isaiah 55:11) "it achieves that for which it was sent". The Bible is all that is needed to know how to be right with God.

Let's focus for a minute on what Paul says in verse 16 "All scripture is God breathed." That's a wonderful expression. It says that even though the words of the Bible were penned by human beings, they are the breath of God breathing out through a human instrument. We often speak of the 'inspiration' of Scripture. 'Inspire' means to breathe into. But the Greek word here is more 'ex-spire', to breathe out. Someone who plays a wind instrument breathes music out of the instrument they're playing. And God has instruments through whom he has breathed. Through the prophets and apostles God said exactly what he wanted to say. So, the words of the Bible are trustworthy and without error.

But there's another important aspect of recognizing that the Bible is God- 'breathed'. When can you feel someone's breath? When they get real close! Most of the time, it is when someone who loves you has their arms around you. It doesn't say that Scripture is God- 'shouted'. From a great distance you can hear someone shout, and you may know nothing about them. But Scripture in its entirety is breathed from the heart of God. That means he is near enough to you that you're encountering him in the Bible. This is about a love relationship. It's not just a book with a series of ideas. It is wonderful to have good Bible teachers and preachers. But it's important to get into the Bible for yourself. You see, as we read it, the Bible teaches us about God because he is breathing out from the very pages. He is that near to us. He is that intimately interested in us. He wants us to hear his heartbeat. He wants us to know what he thinks.

That's the point of the Bible. It teaches us how deeply God has loved us in Jesus. It's not required that we be Bible scholars. What's required is that we receive the Bible as a love letter. Somebody has his arms around us, and is so close we can feel his breath on our face when he's saying these things. Remember what Jesus said to the Pharisees (John 5:39): "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them ... you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me...." When we read the Bible, we will find Jesus on the pages. We will find the one who loves us enough to have written a love letter. We will find the one who explains why he died on the cross for us.

The final thing we note is that Paul says that "Scripture... is useful- for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness". The Words of the Bible enable us to grow in wisdom. It is useful in several ways. Paul says it's good for "teaching and rebuking". That is, if there are errors in our thinking, the teaching will help us understand the errors, and the rebuke will help us change our thinking. The Bible is good for "correcting and training in righteousness". If we are acting in ways we

shouldn't, we can be corrected by the Word of God. And the Bible also "...thoroughly equips us for every good work". It shows us and equips us to be the kind of people God made us to be.

Our Reformation 500 today reminds us we are 'people of the book', because the Bible, and the Bible alone, is God's Word. So, at Hope in the Hills we should be, we are, Bible readers, Bible believers, Bible teachers, because through the Word we find our hope, we find the gospel, we see Jesus. We are those who commit to regularly listening to the preaching, who commit to studying the Bible in small groups, who diligently read the Bible for ourselves. Why do that? So that we know for ourselves where our hope lies, so we can come and relate with God daily, so we can grow in the faith and share our hope with others. In a world where the post-modern position is anything goes, how do we know what to believe, how to behave, what is the reason for our existence? We say God tells us through the Bible. The Bible gives us our world view that helps us interact as Christ's followers in all of life. So, I am encouraging you to be those who will love and read the Bible with enthusiasm, expecting you'll feel the breath of God on you, expressing what's in his heart. Do it not just for yourself but for the Hills community. There so many who are spiritually hungry and looking, longing, for hope.