

“THE VERY BREATH OF GOD.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: II Timothy 3:12-17

Introduction.

Harvard College was founded in 1636 in Boston only 16 years after the Pilgrims got off the Mayflower at Plymouth Rock. Harvard is the oldest institution of higher education in the United States. It was founded to be a school to train Christian ministers.

The original motto, “Truth (Veritas) for Christ (Christo) and the Church (Ecclesiae).”

Harvard’s “Rules and Precepts,” adopted in 1646:

3. Every one shall so exercise himselfe in reading the Scriptures twice a day, that he shall be ready to give such an account of his proficiency therein, both in Theoreticall observations of Language and Logick, and in practical and spiritual truths.

All the Ivy League schools were founded by Puritan Christians, English speaking Reformed Calvinists to train ministers. Nearly 400 years later they are all some of the most secular, even anti-Christian institutions in America.

What happened? Why such a famine of the Word of God?

Hosea 13:6 When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me.

Materialism, false doctrine and liberalism led those schools, and New England, and America into darkness. Desires for unity and peace lead to pluralism and compromise. Affluence leads to softness which leads to lukewarmness. Cultural accommodation leads to theological and spiritual drift. It dulls the Gospel.

There but for the grace of God go you and I. How many of us have gotten soft, comfortable, lukewarm and dull, have compromised ourselves to bend to the winds of the culture?

It is easy to point out there at others, at all those liberals or pagans or compromisers. But what about me. Have I examined my own life? Do I have a real relationship with my Creator in whose image I am created? Do I make plans and decisions based on my own will rather than His will? Am I drifting, is my heart growing cold from neglect and inattention?

As I called us to more serious and earnest prayer last week through Paul's prayer for the Colossians, this week I continue our new year's focus by reminding us of the treasure and gift given to us in God's Word.

II Timothy 3:12-17.

As Paul urged Timothy, so I urge us to be well acquainted with the sacred writings, meaning the Bible. From childhood. If you have from your childhood and your youth read the Bible and become familiar with the mind and will of God, you are blessed more than most. You cannot be wiser. May you continue to be filled with the knowledge of the will of God.

Paul plainly teaches us two things.

The unique source of Scripture.

The Greek word Paul uses in II Timothy is never used anywhere else in the NT. Theopneustos – God-breathed. It's the very breath of God.

Scripture is completely inspired by God as if He had handwritten the entire Bible and not just the two tablets of the Law. God is the source, the author, it originated in His mind and was communicated from His mouth by the Holy Spirit. As the prophets frequently said, "the mouth of the Lord has spoken it."

God illuminated the minds and understanding of the prophets and apostles and carefully guided them in their writing to say only what God said so their words are His infallible Words, without error.

We believe in what is called the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible. *Plenary* means all the words are inspired, not just ideas or concepts. "All Scripture is God-breathed."

Verbal means the words themselves are inspired. Every last word of the Bible is directly and divinely inspired by God. That means they have absolute authority, the authority of God stands behind them. What the Bible says, God says. "It is written, thus saith the Lord."

Therefore, to not trust God's authoritative, sufficient, clear, necessary, inerrant, complete and final word in Bible is not to trust God Himself. To deny the words of Scripture is to deny God.

When Paul writes "all Scripture is breathed out by God" that is an inspired statement made by God Himself categorically declaring all His Word is without error.

You can have complete confidence in the Word of God whatever the world may say. It is the verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, trustworthy and true, eternal Word of God. This is our rule for faith and practice. This is our life.

If we are going to profit from Scripture we must accept its authority, it's infallible inspiration, it's complete sufficiency, and submit wholeheartedly to it.

I was on a social media site for pastors the other day and a pastor asked the question: "I'm wondering if any you have done a series on a book that you would recommend? (not a book of the bible....)" And then a bunch of pastors chimed in with various books by human authors that they had used to preach sermons from.

Wait what, you want to preach on some human author's book? Why not one of the books of the Bible?

We trust the Bible over all modern authorities, over science, over modern opinions and speculation. We submit all our thoughts and words and actions to the Word of God. We accept the Scriptures as our only and final authority for our faith and life and practice.

As John Calvin said so clearly on II Timothy 3:16, "We owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God."

"It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4).

The Bible has an utterly unique origin, source. It is other worldly, supernature, a miracle and gift from God, in your hands.

The powerful purpose of Scripture.

Paul gives Scripture the highest praise possible. It is able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Nowhere else can you find wisdom that is able to save you for eternal life. If you are not wise unto salvation, you are not wise at all.

Then Paul adds it is profitable for right understanding and right living, creed and conduct, orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Scripture is profitable for teaching. This may be its main use. It is to "make us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ." But this teaching is never just to be informative. It is to be applied and that often means for reproof and correction. When we have sinned and been admonished and we acknowledge the truth and are convicted in our spirits, then we follow that with repentance. Correction, change of course, transformation follows from reproof or admonition.

There is much in the Bible that is not given for our comfort, but for our discomfort. It is meant to unsettle us, wake us up, wound our souls with painful truth. It lovingly calls us away from sin.

Finally, there is instruction or training in righteousness, meaning how to live a godly and holy life, that we may be competent, complete, meaning perfect, or mature. Scripture is the main source of help to grow us to maturity, to become a mature man or woman.

In this evil age, in this sin wracked world, when things are going from bad to worse to terrible, and evil men are destroying things, and false teachers are leading many astray, the Word of God is profitable, true, able to make you wise in an insane world and bring you to salvation in a world going to hell, and make you mature and competent, equipped for every good work.

We must also hold to the absolute authority of the Bible because there are hard days coming and we are going to need an anchor in the storm. We must leave our children and grandchildren something sure and solid.

Implications and application.

Do you ever hear someone say God spoke to them and wish you could have the same experience? Have you ever prayed and asked God to speak to you in some clear way? And then wait for some voice, all the while your Bible is sitting next to you closed.

God is a Father God. He speaks clearly to His children, He makes His will known, He warns and disciplines and gives clear blessings and curses. Imagine a father who didn't speak, who was silent and distant and kept his children in the dark. These are the words of a loving heavenly Father speaking clearly the truth to His children.

God, who is the overflowing fountain of all good, saw our need, and out of His deep and special care for us, condescended to our level and to our language to speak to us in a way we could understand.

Out of God's Fatherly love and special care *for us and for our salvation* He has revealed secret things.

Nehemiah 9:13-14 You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments, 14 and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant.

Deuteronomy 29:29 "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

God has revealed His mighty hand in creation. He has shown us His unique blessing of creating us in His image. He has told us the tragic story of our descent into sin. He has revealed to us His divine plan to redeem us by His only Son our beloved Savior. Here is laid out for us the plan of our salvation at the cross of Jesus and how we may obtain eternal life by believing Him

and trusting Him and obeying Him. Here is everything we need to know to lead a godly, mature life by faith in Christ Jesus.

The Bible has no equal, it is in a class by itself, it is on a shelf by itself. There is nothing else in the world like it and there never will be.

Neil Postman asked a question in his classic *Amusing Ourselves To Death*:

“How often does it occur that information provided you on morning radio or television, or in the morning newspaper, causes you to alter your plans for the day, or to take some action you would not otherwise have taken, or provides insight into some problem you are required to solve?”

Maybe a weather report might get us to change clothes or grab an umbrella. Maybe a stock market report might influence how we invest. But think about it, 99% of all the news we get consists of information about which we can do nothing.

What steps will we take to change the war in the Ukraine, or solve the conflict in the Middle East? What can any of us do about NATO, OPEC, NAFTA, FBI or IRS? What are your plans to change the climate or slow inflation? What will any of us do about the Governor’s latest policies other than grumble or complain? The news leaves us basically impotent.

If we want to have any significant effect in our lives, we must shift our thinking to areas of our lives where we can take meaningful action to change our own world. I propose we stop watching cable news and start reading God’s good news and apply it to our own lives.

Let the rain of God’s Word water your soul and you will see real fruit. Let God’s Word transform you into who God created you to be and allow it to guide you to do what God called you to do.

Today is the day God has given us to seek and follow Him. Today is the day God is calling us to a real relationship with Him. He wants to personally meet each of us in His Word. This is His heart, this is the place He wants to meet us and nourish our spirits and deepen our relationship with Him and each other. This is where God wants to meet us to give us life., to increase in us the knowledge of Him and His will (Col. 1:9-12).

Wear your Bibles out. Use them to the point that you have to replace them every few years. Cultivate a hunger and thirst for God’s Word. It’s your life, your health, your joy. Embrace it, love it, let it be you passion and zeal.

Whenever you read your Bible make it profitable by asking God four questions based on Paul’s four words, 1) is He teaching me something, 2) telling me to stop doing something I am doing, 3) correcting some wrong thinking or behavior, or 4) is He preparing me to live more effectively for him.

My prayer is that 2023 may be the most spiritually faithful and fruitful year in your life and in the life of First Christian Reformed Church. And the greatest hope for that lies in our regularly reading, memorizing, and praying the Word of God. As a shepherd of your souls, for the sake of your souls, please take up the book God wrote and read it.

Prayer: Our Holy Father in Heaven, we ask you this morning to bless our seeking of you. Bless us with a deep and lasting hunger and thirst for righteousness, fan the flame of our zeal for the truth of your word, and a great love for it. Grant in our brokenness and imperfection that we would desire the fullness of Christ. Help our unbelief, forgive our wandering affections. Deliver us from our small desires and our foolish pursuits. Help us parents and grandparents instill a love for your Word and a hunger for it in our kids hearts. I pray for your Fatherly blessing to be upon this flock. Make us faithful and fruitful for your glory, in Jesus name, Amen.