

The apostles, as they write, are very conscious that the words of the message they preach are the words of God. Listen to Paul as he is writing to the Thessalonians, in his first letter, Chapter 2, Verse 13:

*And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, ... (1 Th 2:13 RSV)*

There is a clear declaration that he was conscious of speaking more than his own thoughts, more than his own ideas, more than his own theological concepts. The apostles regarded each other's words in this same light. There is that striking passage in Second Peter 3:15 where Peter says,

*And count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. (2 Pet 3:15-16 RSV)*

Peter makes very clear that he accepted Paul's writings as Scripture, and the early church accepted these apostolic writings as the very words of the Lord Jesus right from the beginning. In view of this, when a professor behind a desk in Chicago or New York or London makes a pronouncement that differs from what Paul or Peter or James or John has said, then reject it, for that professor is some thousands of miles and some two thousand years too far away to make an adequate and proper judgment. These men who lived in the 1st century and associated with the Lord Jesus, who heard his words, and who so ministered in power throughout the world of their day as to transform the generation in which they lived, knew far more about what God thought and said than any man studying theology today. So our second proposition is that, in thinking about the authority of the Word, we must remember that, as Christians, we have no right to a different view of Scripture than that held by the apostles, or we cannot consistently call ourselves Christians.

Here is the third proposition:

**III. We can never discover the depths of Scripture's insights into life without first accepting it as true and authoritative**

What I am saying is that we must first believe Scripture before we can understand it. As long as we keep asking,

*"Should this passage be here? Is it genuine, is it real? Has it been inserted? Is it a legend? Is it a fairy tale? Is it something that is merely the thinking of the apostles and was*

*never in the mind of Christ?" -- if this is our constant approach then we can never get around to asking, "What does this say to me? What does it mean? Where is the wisdom hidden in this that I need so desperately in my life?"*

Those students and pseudo-scholars who feel they are a final authority on what ought to be here, and what ought not to be here, never seem to be able to understand what is written. They never seem able to say anything about the depths of Scripture or the teaching of it, for they exclude themselves from understanding by their attitude of judgment over it.

We can never understand the Scripture until we believe it first. You cannot understand nuclear physics unless you first believe the underlying axioms that have to do with this realm of human knowledge. You cannot believe anything until you accept it as genuine and put it to the test of experience, and this is true of the Word. When you believe that this book is from God and, as Proverbs says, "*Cry out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures*" (Prov 2:3:4 RSV), then this book will reveal to you the marvels of a deliberately patterned structure that can only be of God's making, and reveal to you astounding grasps of life and explanations of how the human heart operates.

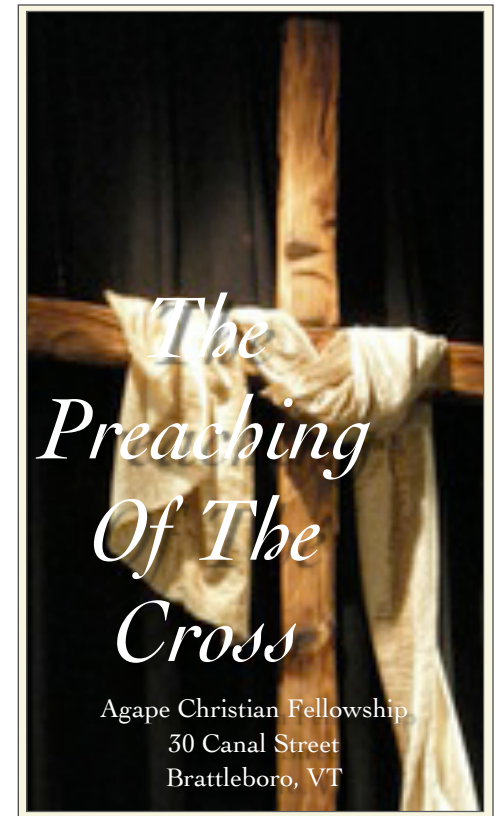
**IV. Scripture does not need to be defended, but simply declared**

Charles Spurgeon said, "The Bible is like a lion. Who ever heard of defending a lion? Just turn it loose, it will defend itself." And so will Scripture! The whole testimony of this church is to the fact that it is the preaching and the exposition of the Bible that establishes its authority. **We do not need to defend it, just declare it, proclaim it.**

The choice that is left to us as Christians is very simple; it is always the same in every generation: either we accept the Bible as God's word to us, his own self-revelation, his own explanation of the affairs of life and of human history, or, as the only other alternative, we must rest our faith upon the shifting, complex, ever-changing authority of modern knowledge and human ability. It is either Christ or the critics, one or the other. One way leads to moral decline and final collapse; the other way brings us to illuminating insights into our own hearts, and into the processes of history and to the place of integrity and character.

# AGAPE

## PULPIT SERIES



## The Preaching of the Cross

Part III

## The Authority of the Word

2 Timothy 3

Rev. Michael Gantt

Over the past couple of decades there have been a host of cases of Christians, some of whom were rather prominent Christian leaders, who have suffered total moral collapse, having made shipwrecks of their lives and marriages. In each case the first sign of impending disaster, the first outward mark of inward deterioration, was a shift in their view of the authority of the Word of God. There is a very definite link between moral decline and the authority of Scripture, and I would like to underscore this truth with a scripture from 2 Timothy 3:1-17

Reading from Paul's second letter to Timothy, chapter three, the first five verses, the apostle says, *But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, fierce, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it. Avoid such people.* (2 Tim 3:2-5 RSV)

In the remainder of the chapter he goes on to specify two individuals who fit this pattern and to give us by contrast his own way of life. Then he closes the whole section with a personal exhortation to Timothy, beginning in Verse 12: *Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* (2 Tim 3:12-17 RSV)

Notice how he moves from the theme of deterioration of faith and moral collapse to the one remedy and cure for the believer, a reverence for and obedience to the written word of God. As Paul outlines it here, the defense of a Christian in a day of moral decline is a thorough familiarity with the written Scriptures, while any defection from faith which may occur is made possible only by an abandonment of these writings, in attitude, at least, if not in act.

Now, you know well that the Word of God has been under attack for many centuries. Like an ancient castle it has withstood many assaults. Up to and through the 17th century these attacks were primarily outward. That is, they were an assault from without by men who tried to destroy the Scriptures by direct methods. History is full of accounts of book

burnings, papal interdicts, and even the murder of translators of the Word of God. But these outward attacks against the Bible utterly failed. In the 18th century a new approach was made by the enemies of Scripture. Instead of sending soldiers to attack the castle, the enemies of the Bible sent workmen -- carpenters, bricklayers and masons -- who came offering to remodel the whole structure. They said, in effect, "This is a good, strong building. It simply needs a bit of renovation here and there." They began to rearrange the structure of the castle of God's Word. They drained the moat, tore down the wall, removed the doors, and when they were through everything was quite different than it was before. There was no longer any castle there and no longer any defense for those who would seek a refuge.

As to any permanent or lasting effect on the church as a whole, this attack from those who stand in pulpits and those who sit in theological chairs in seminaries will, and has, utterly failed. For Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," (Matt 16:18b KJV). No force will really overthrow the Word of God; we never need to fear that. But as far as individuals are concerned, it is possible for these attacks against the Scripture to upset their faith, and it is this that Paul warns about as he writes to his son in the faith from his prison in Rome.

Without attempting an exposition of this passage, I would like to declare to you four propositions which I feel must govern our thinking as we approach the subject of the authority of the Scriptures in this 20th century. The first of these propositions is this:

### **I. As Christians, we have no right to hold a different view of Scripture than that held by Jesus himself**

That is the first fact we must keep in mind as we come to this subject of the authority of the Word. To put it another way, the authority of the Bible rests squarely upon the authority of Jesus Christ himself. To be a Christian at all means that we have fully accepted the authority of Jesus. If we don't do that, then we are not Christians -- except in name only. **It is an utter inconsistency to say that we accept what the Bible says about Christ and reject what he says about Scripture.** We cannot say of Jesus that he is the image of the invisible God, the bodily expression of the fullness of God, that in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and that he is before all things and by him all things hold together -- but he is quite wrong about Adam and Noah and Jonah and the rest of the Old Testament. You see the utter inconsistency of that position? We cannot call

him Lord, and say he has the right to choose our mates, and to pick our line of work, and to govern our life in all its attitudes and ways -- even to trust our eternal destiny into his hands -- but we cannot believe him when he speaks of the creation of man, or the sanctity of marriage, or the sinfulness of certain sexual acts. We are utterly inconsistent if we do.

We need only to read the New Testament to see that the Lord Jesus casts the mantle of his authority over all of the Old Testament, and, by anticipation, over all of the New. Remember he said, speaking of the Old Testament, "*the scripture cannot be broken,*" (John 10:35b). Over and over again he quotes from the Old Testament, Jesus receives them, quotes freely from them, uses them as authority. In his own ministry, you remember, it was with the written Word of God from the book of Deuteronomy, that Jesus turned the tables on the enemy when he came to tempt him in the wilderness and utterly defeated Satan in his attack upon him.

Then there is that remarkable passage in Luke, the 24th chapter, when the Lord Jesus is speaking to his disciples after his resurrection and he takes them to task for their failure to believe the Scriptures. He says (Verse 25):

*"O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.* (Luke 24:25-27 RSV)

### **II. As Christians, we have no right to a view of Scripture which are different from the apostles' view of Scripture**

The apostles, like Jesus, are our teachers. We are not theirs. Karl Barth says, "We cannot stand and look over the apostles' shoulders, correcting their work. It is they who stand looking over our shoulders, correcting our work." The apostles, in writing the New Testament, everywhere declare that their authority is simply the Lord's authority. They, too, rest the authority of their words squarely upon the authority of the Lord Jesus. Paul says repeatedly, "*I have declared unto you only that which I have received,*" (cf, 1 Cor 15:3). In other words, this is not a fabricated message. It is not something borrowed from this philosophy, and that authority, and this way of thinking. It is not, Paul says, received from men at all. He specifically and clearly declares that he did not in any way receive his message from men, or even from the other apostles, but from the Lord Jesus Christ directly (cf, Gal 1:12).