

***BluePrints: God-Breathed***

***By Jason Huff***

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***Deuteronomy 30:9-16; Luke 24:36-48; 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5***

Friends, our final Scripture reading today is from 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5. I invite you to turn their in your Bibles and pull the insert out of your bulletin to follow along. Let's listen now to the Word of God. "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-- with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."

"In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue." We all know that little factoid from school, right? But how do we know it? Why do we believe it? Probably a teacher taught it to us. Perhaps we got it out of a textbook. But why do we trust that what that teacher or textbook said was true? Maybe Columbus sailed in 1392. Maybe he didn't come here at all.

Our lives are built on relationships of trust. Some things we trust a lot – textbooks and teachers. Some things we don't trust, like used car salesmen. We live our lives based on who and what we trust, and it affects us a lot. Many folks still don't believe a man has been on the moon. They think the broadcasts were done by camera tricks. They didn't trust the source. They didn't trust the government. They didn't trust the broadcasters.

Trust can be fleeting. We trust what we've seen with our own eyes...but what if our eyes lie to us? Why do we trust what we trust? Ultimately, we must set foundations, cornerstones, which root and center us. We must decide where our core beliefs will be found. Some argue for scientific beliefs, others for various religions, still more for all sorts of wacky belief system. But no matter who you are, you trust some things to be true. We often just don't think about why.

Today, we're going to discuss the pillar of our faith, the groundwork on which everything we believe is laid, and that's Scripture. Last week, I told you that as we started Crossway, we would look at the eight essentials of our new denomination, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The first one is special. It is so important that it gets its own category because the other seven essentials are based upon it. It's the basis for everything we believe as Christians. It's the Bible. Here's the first essential tenet of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church:

All Scripture is self-attesting and being Truth, requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life. The infallible Word of God, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is a complete and unified witness to God's redemptive acts culminating in the incarnation of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible, uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the supreme and final authority on all matters on which it speaks. On this sure foundation we affirm these additional Essentials of our faith.

That's an impressive statement. I want to look at it alongside Scripture itself so we can get to the heart of what we believe and this book on which we stand.

The essentials start off strong. *All Scripture is self-attesting and being Truth, requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life.* What does it mean that Scripture is self-attesting? It means that Scripture testifies about itself as to its own validity. In this morning's passage, Paul tells Timothy that all Scripture is God-breathed. That means it comes from God; it was inspired by God; He inspired its earthly authors to write what they wrote. Scripture is infallible – not because its human writers were perfect, but because God inspired it, it never fails us. It contains everything He wanted us to know about Himself and His dealings with mankind.

It doesn't mean, though, that we trust the Bible simply because it says, "I'm Scripture...trust me!" Lots of books claim divine inspiration, yet we don't believe the Koran of Islam or the Rig Vedas of Hinduism or the writings of the Buddha. Why do we trust what *this* book says about itself? For some of us, it's a heart issue. We read it, we're convicted of our sin and convinced of what Jesus did for us, and that's all we need. But many people in other religions feel the same way about their holy books. What makes Scripture different?

Unlike other religions, what we find in Scripture is a factual account of historical truth. Nothing else from the ancient world is remotely like it. And when we understand that the Bible was written over 1500 years, we see that what was written earliest was later fulfilled. Remember our passage from Luke this morning? Jesus explains to His disciples how the whole of Scripture testifies to Him. He starts at the beginning and works His way through the Old Testament. Jesus proved its truth to the disciples. That proof is still there, and we can read it for ourselves.

That truth is seen most clearly through Jesus' life. The actions He took, the things He did and the things that were done to Him, all fall into place with the predictions and prophecies of the Old Testament. Hundreds of details, things that Jesus could not have personally affected, fell in line. Over and over again we learn it is truthful even in incidental and trivial matters. Archaeology keeps proving it, even though many scholars would love to see it disproven.

It is also our foundation because it is true to life. As Paul said, it is useful for "teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." It is effective in working out God's plan in human hearts. When we read the Bible, we find out that it speaks to us. It's about ancient people, but it's just as much about us! It makes sense of the human condition. We have little problem believing it because its stories, laws, everything in it matches what we find in real life. We have a hard time accepting it because it *is* so real, because it calls us to account and teaches that salvation is in God's hands, not ours. Yet even our hesitation reinforces its truthfulness.

That leads to the hardest part – *because the Bible is truth, it requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life.* Nobody likes that thought. Why should we submit ourselves to rules and laws and concepts taught to us in a dusty old book? It's because it's true. Truth does not change with the times. If something holds universally true, time cannot affect it.

If Columbus really did sail in 1492, whether the book telling us that was written yesterday or five hundred years ago, it still holds true. Most people accept 1492 as the date Columbus sailed because it makes absolutely no difference to how we live our lives now. We accept many historical facts without question because they have no relevance to us personally.

But the Bible is different. The Bible is truth. And the Bible is eternally relevant. It was relevant two thousand years ago; it is relevant today, and it will always be. The Word of God stands forever. Even when we meet God and know Him face to face, the Word of God will still exist because God does not change. What He said in 4000 BC will always be true.

The real rub is that phrase, “it requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life.” Even the most faithful pastor is not unreservedly submitted 100% of the time to God and His holy Word. Only Jesus was. But that is our standard. That is our aim. We know that God forgives us our failings through the blood of Jesus Christ. But we stand confident on God's Word and we submit to it. Just because we cannot reach 100% does not mean we can lower the goal. If somebody runs a 25-mile race, it's long, but it's still not a marathon. We are running the marathon. We stumble and fail and fall, but we keep running.

We submit completely to Scripture, which means that they are things that we do *not* submit to. We do not submit to how we feel about God. Feelings come and go, but the Word of God is forever. We do not submit to what we think God should do. We are not God; the Bible tells us who He is, and we submit to Him, not our thoughts about who He should be. We do not submit to human opinion regarding God's ways. Every society has taken offense at something in the Word of God, but society itself is fleeting. God's Word stands.

That leads into another key point – *because the Bible is the supreme and final authority on all matters on which it speaks, it protects us as we submit to it.* After encouraging young Timothy to preach the Word of God in all times and seasons, Paul says to do so with great care and patience, “for the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”

Doesn't that sound familiar? It's happening right now. It's not the first time in history people have turned from sound doctrine, but Americans are turning from Christianity en masse. Even secular sociologists admit that no society has seen such a radical turnaround on ethical and moral issues in such a short period of time as the modern United States.

It's true inside the church too. On one side, people want God to change His mind on social issues. They want a god that smiles on whatever we want to do. On the other side, many want Jesus to be Santa Claus, the key to greater wealth, health, and prosperity. They don't want the Creator of the universe who deeply loves His creation but also punishes our unrighteousness.

But when we submit to the plain sense of God's Word, it actually frees us. It frees us to fully obey God, and it frees us from having to figure out the shifting sands of culture and how it wants us to act. I saw a movie trailer the other day for a film set in the '80s. Did we have any sense of fashion sense in the '80s? We certainly didn't have one in the '70s. 40 years from now, people will look back and laugh at us. Sadly, society wears trends for a while until it gets tired of them, and then they're out of date. It's exhausting figuring out our fickle society. But if we stick with God's Word, we're free to focus on God, the only One whose opinion really matters.

Let's look at another key point of this essential – *“The infallible Word of God, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is a complete and unified witness to God's redemptive acts culminating in the incarnation of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.”* This is the most beautiful part of the essential. It means the history of God's salvation is written on every page of the Bible.

We often think of the Old and New Testament as distant relatives. We ignore the Old Testament because it's about God's dealings in ancient history, and we're more interested in Jesus and how God deals with us now. But serious students of the Bible know that God has not changed at all. He is the same God in both testaments. He deals with people the same way. In both, He commands our obedience, convicts us of our sinfulness, and convinces us that our hope lies not in our own goodness but in His grace to us. If you never read the Old Testament, you miss out on a ton of who God is.

We hear from the Old Testament every week in our Scripture readings because it is an important part of the history of salvation. Our passage from Deuteronomy laid out before us the importance of Scripture – the Word of God is not far from His people; He's given it to us to know Him, to trust Him, and to obey Him. It holds life and death. Without the Old Testament, we don't get why the Messiah is such a big deal and why we need Him so badly.

What's amazing about Scripture is that it is unified. At least 40 authors, writing over a span of 1500 years, write sixty-six books that fit together perfectly. 40 authors, 1500 years, and yet it all makes sense. It is cohesive. And it all unites around one central figure – Jesus, the long-awaited Christ, the One who would rescue us from our sins. Jesus is what everything in history is leading up to. That's why we spend so much time on the New Testament talking about Him. But the most beautiful thing about Scripture is that God inspired every page, He speaks to us from every page, and our need for salvation and its fulfillment is on every page. I encourage you to read every page.

All this leads me to our last thought for the day, the one that we should take home with us and apply not just this week but always: *to truly be in relationship with God, we've got to know Scripture, learn Scripture, love Scripture, and apply Scripture.* Paul told Timothy to continue in what he had learned through the holy Scriptures he had been taught since he was a little child. His call to Timothy was to preach the Word of God – everything else Timothy was to do flowed out of his knowing and applying Scripture.

Many of us don't have the background in the Bible Timothy did. Some of us were taught that the Bible was something for somebody else to read and study; we were just to obey what they said, whether that was a priest or pastor or elders or a church board or whomever. But in the first several centuries of the church, most believers were literate. They were taught to read so they could read Scripture. For those who couldn't, Scripture was read in worship – often, whole books at a time. And after the illiteracy of the Dark Ages, when the church went through the Reformation in the 1500s, we reclaimed Bible reading as the joyful privilege of every believer.

As a church committed to the essentials of faith – and thus the priority of Scripture in our lives – we're going to do some basic things to emphasize it. I'm used to reading Scripture from my sermon notes – but I'm going to have my Bible up here with me from now on. It's a small thing, but it's a visual reminder of its importance. And I want you to bring your Bibles with you to church. It's a habit most of us don't have, but we can start. If you bring your Bible, you can make notes in it for later. And if you're like me and writing in any book drives you nuts, you can maybe take your sermon notes and place them in that place in your Bible so you can remember to look at them again later. You can even bring it in on your Kindle or your phone – just have it with you so you can refer to it and get used to being in it.

But the biggest thing we have to do is read the Bible. A Bible left on a shelf, even left on a nightstand or kitchen table unread, is worthless. The physical book means nothing. Reading it means everything. This week, we've put in your bulletin the E100 Challenge – a series of 100 Bible readings that give you the core of the Biblical story. It just scratches the surface, but it will give you an overview of the whole Scripture and give you an appetite for more. If you've never read it, it's a good place to start. And if you have, I encourage you to keep reading daily. Most of us check Facebook each day to check on our friends, or at least we click on our email box to see if anybody's written. God has written us a love letter across the sea of time – it's there for us every day to read so we might know His love and embrace Him in return. Don't miss out on your time with Him in Scripture, time that will strengthen you for whatever the day holds.

Next week, we will get into the essentials we find within the Scripture. But for now, remember that you can always stand on the Word of God. It guides us, commands us, and gives us God's very word to us. When we read His Word, we find He has written it to us. When we submit our lives to His Word, we find our lives finally make sense in a world that so seldom does. When we cling to it, we will find it will have made us “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”