Bible Study: Luther’s Five Favorite Verses

Week Two: Word Alone

2 Timothy 3:16-17

*16 All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. 17 God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.*

1. Background of the Second Epistle of Paul to Timothy
   1. Traditionally written by Paul to..Timothy!
      1. Under this model, date of writing is most likely Written by Paul in AD 61 or 65. Why one or other? Paul was in prison in Rome TWICE: once in 61, once in 65. So don’t know during which imprisonment he wrote it
      2. If it was Paul, was written before his death in 67
   2. Majority of people think it was NOT written by Paul The reason for this is differences in language and content.
      1. Pseudepigraphy was common
      2. Language: Paul was undoubtedly the writer of Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon. Well when you compare those to the three Pastorals (1 & 2 Tim. and Titus), this writer simply doesn’t write like Paul does. People have compared language, sentence structure, and these three have the same author, and it’s probably not Paul.
         1. Example: Pastorals contain word Presbuteros, never appears in the seven Pauline letters, but it does in all three Pastorals
      3. Content: the circumstance of the church in the Pastorals does not fit with the church at Paul’s time, but rather with the later church.
         1. Example: Presbuteros was an office in the early church, but that office didn’t emerge until well after Paul
         2. Example: the Pauline letters assume women are leaders in the church, but in the Pastorals, they are not. This change happened after Paul
   3. Background of the Epistle
      1. Timothy was a companion of Paul from Lystra, in Asia Minor. Southwest Turkey, near the coast not on it. Son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother who became a Christian in Acts 16:1 and is mentioned as a companion of Paul quite a few times in Acts. He’s mentioned several times in the Pauline letters as a trusted companion and fellow worker
      2. Is a “pastoral” letter: means that it was addressed not to the whole church like Romans, but to the “pastor,” the leader
      3. It is a set of instructions for church leaders, an earnest letter from a veteran missionary to a younger colleague. Timothy is a leader of a group of churches and the letter is meant to help him preserve and prosper the church in the face of external threats and internal conflict.
2. Setting of This Verse Within the Epistle
   1. In 2 Timothy, endurance is the most common answer to the crises that face the church. The epistle exhorts them to all diligence and steadfastness in the face of false teachings, with advice about combating them with reference to the teachings of the past, and to patience under persecution (1:6–15), and to a faithful discharge of all the duties of his office (4:1–5).
   2. Ch. 1:1-2 are the standard introduction used in Paul and Pastorals.
   3. Ch 1:3-18 Timothy is urged to rekindle his faith and not be ashamed
   4. 2:1-13 Timothy is to take his share of suffering as a soldier for Christ
   5. 2:14-19 Timothy is to be steadfast in the midst of false teachers
   6. 2:20-26 To do this, Timothy is to purify himself
   7. 3:10-17 How is he to purify himself? By following the example of Paul, who is at the end of his life
   8. The section after this is Paul’s moving farewell words which bring hope
3. Read 2 Timothy 3:10-17, Study of verses 16-17
   1. What did Paul lean on to purify and strengthen himself in times of trouble?
   2. We read it right here: he relied on God’s word.
   3. This is the verse people use to say the Bible is written by God. Ok, fine, but it was edited by people, which is why you get some weird stuff
   4. All scripture is useful for: teaching, reproof, correction, training in righteousness
      1. Another translation: It is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.
   5. If we read it, we will be: proficient and equipped for every good work.
      1. Another translation: God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.
   6. This is what the whole letter is, in summary. It’s really a summary of Pauls theology
   7. God has acted powerfully to save Jew and Gentile; healing the division
   8. We can only receive that gift. We do so by faith
   9. God’s righteousness comes from God’s divine nature.
   10. Faith is the sole condition of salvation
4. Luther’s Comments:
   1. Luther would have had no idea about pseudepigraphy, and doesn’t matter anyway
   2. Luther ironically did not like the Epistle of James, despite loving this verse
   3. This is the basis of Luther’s doctrine of Sola scriptura: that the Christian Scriptures are the sole rule of faith and practice. For Lutherans, the bible is the final authority on belief and practice. We hold this in common with Evangelicals
   4. Catholics, Orthodox, and most mainline protestants believe in that it’s a combination of scripture and tradition. But not for us.
   5. In fact, the intention of the Reformation was to correct what Luther asserted to be the errors of the Catholic Church by appealing to the Bible's authority. At that time it was only the church leaders who could interpret the bible. Sola scriptura meant rejecting the infallible authority given to the Magisterium to interpret both Scripture and Church tradition. Luther felt that by only allowing one group to interpret the bible, that group was being given more authority than the bible. Luther said, "a simple layman armed with Scripture is greater than the mightiest pope without it," and believed that the ecclesiastical authority is viewed as subject to correction by the Scriptures, even by an individual member of the Church.
   6. With Sola scriptura, the church and it’s tradition are still the primary interpreter, but scripture must be the final authority in matters of faith and practice. As Luther said, "The true rule is this: God's Word shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel can do so."[11]
5. Summary
   1. 2 Timothy is a letter to a pastor dealing with several difficult problems inside and outside of their church
   2. Paul’s answer is to those problems is to do what I did: rely on God’s word and allow it to prepare and equip the people for every good work.
   3. Luther was inspired by this verse to a concept that we will still hold very dear today: that the bible is the primary source of faith and practice for the church and all of us.