

SCRIPTURE READING:

Psalm 119:9-16

How can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to your word.
With my whole heart I seek you;
let me not wander from your commandments!

I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.
Blessed are you, O Lord;
teach me your statutes!
With my lips I declare
all the rules of your mouth.

In the way of your testimonies I delight
as much as in all riches.
I will meditate on your precepts
and fix my eyes on your ways.
I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.

WHAT IS THE BIBLE:

We Believe, Week One
2 Timothy 3:10-17

If you have a Bible begin turning to 2 Timothy 3:10.

Before we look to the text let's do a little questionnaire. What do you personally depend upon as your life authority? What is it, when a decision needs to be made, and you're constantly making decisions--

- Do I like the career I'm in or should I make a change?
- Where should we buy a home?
- Do we want kids, or not? For some of you it's too late.
- Where am I going to eat lunch after this preacher shuts up?
Hopefully, you aren't asking that question yet, but in case you are, Jim and Nick's BBQ up the road is great!

You and I are constantly making decisions. Big ones, little ones, life changing ones. Whatever you go to when you have to make a decision--that's your life authority. You throw the decision against that life authority and it gives you guidance.

Our text today is going to say, "Your guiding life authority should be the Scriptures." When a decision comes down the pike, above all else you should toss that decision against the Scriptures and follow whatever guidance you find there.

Now, we bristle when we hear that. We stiffen up, and we become really alert. An internal siren starts going off. Why? It's because we believe that the making the Scriptures our guiding life authority is going to:

- Place a huge burden on our backs. It's going to restrict us. It's going to rob our freedom. It's going to hem us in.
- We bristle because we just know this is going to be a one-way relationship. God speaks. We shut up, listen and do as we're told.
- We bristle because having the Scripture as our guiding life authority will rob us of real living. "If I follow the Bible I'll be giving up my life!"

What I want to show you today that it's exactly the opposite. Making the Scriptures your guiding life authority will actually

- Give you a freedom you never thought possible. Instead of constricting you it's going to release you.
- It won't be a one-way relationship. It's be a conversation. The Scriptures don't just talk at you, they converse with you.
- The Scriptures as your guiding life authority won't rob you of your real life, they'll actually open up to you depths of life that you never thought accessible.

Alright, big promises there. Let's see if we can deliver on them, and let's begin by reading what the Apostle Paul says under three headings:

1. THE NEED FOR AUTHORITY
2. THE CONVERSATION OF AUTHORITY

3. THE LIFE OF AUTHORITY

Hopefully you've found our passage by now. Let's begin reading in verse 10:

¹⁰ You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹ my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. ¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ **But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.** ¹

1. THE NEED FOR AUTHORITY

Every single person has an authority. Whether you realize it or not, you have some form of authority over you. You either have an authority guiding you that gives you freedom, or takes your freedom.

We tend to think that having the Scriptures as our authority will limit our freedom, but it's the opposite. Paul says that those who have shaken off God's authority are actually the ones who lose freedom and rob others of freedom:

¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ **But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed,**

Authority doesn't constrict—it frees in two senses:

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (2 Ti 3:10–17). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

External Freedom

¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse,

In other words, here are people who are an authority unto themselves. Here are people who have shook off all constraints except for their appetite.

Here's a man who's made his success at business the measure of his life. If the family suffers, so be it. If co-workers get in the way, he'll run them over. If he can trade a little integrity for a promotion so be it.

Here's a single person who's made finding someone to be with their singular aim. They've given up their dignity for community. Now they'll do anything to keep this foundation from slipping in their life.

Here's a Christian who's made rules keeping, and religion their guiding authority. They've become condescending and cruel to anyone who doesn't live up to their standard.

When we shake off authority we don't gain freedom—we lose it and we steal it from others.

Paul is saying when you shake off God's authority, and set up your own you begin harming other people, and you harm yourself. He's trying to get you to realize that the only way for human beings to flourish is to have authority.

We live in a free nation. It's one of the things we value most. We want, at as many places as possible, to secure and provide personal freedoms—and the only way to do that is through establishing authority structures. **The law of the land preserves the freedom of the land.** You actually cannot have freedom without law. It just doesn't work.

You need authority to secure external freedom. Lawlessness isn't real freedom—it's individual tyranny.

You don't just need an authority to have external freedom, you need authority to have internal freedom too.

Internal Freedom

¹³ *while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived*

He shifts from talking about external progressions of evil, to an internal progression of uncertainty.

In other words, to have no authority, nothing to which you can look to if all else fails, is to be increasingly uncertain. Do you want to live in doubt? Do you want to question and labor over every decision and constantly live in the fear that it may have been the wrong choice? Do you really want to bear the weight of your decisions? Do you feel strong enough to make decisions and deal with the outcomes? Do you trust yourself with that?

You need an external freedom, and you need internal freedom from doubt. You need a fountain beneath your feet that gives you stable ground to walk on.

Listen, you don't get a foundation beneath your feet without an authority above your head. You and I need authority.

But, look also, at:

2. THE CONVERSATION OF AUTHORITY

Now, at this point in the sermon there's a huge danger to avoid. I've just said that we all need an authority over us, and that's true. And we've said the Scriptures claim to be that authority, and that's true.

Here's the danger—

To the irreligious person in the room. Maybe you're far from God. You're just here because someone invited you, but you have no desire to learn about or follow God. You are really just committed to living your own life by your own rules.

You'll hear everything I just said about authority—and you say, “See, this isn't for me. I'm perfectly in control of my own life, and

Christians just want to place a bunch of laws on my life. If the Bible is just a law to obey, I'm not interested.”

Religious person in the room. You fall prey to the same trap, but your response will be completely different. You hear this kind of talk about authority and one of two things happens:

Some religious people hear this kind of talk about authority and they swell with pride. For them, the Bible is a truth manual used to promote their own religion and bash other people. You'll hear that the Scriptures are to be your authority, and you'll relish that.

Some religious people hear about the Bible being their authority and they shrink in fear. The Bible should be obeyed as an authority, but not because they love God—it's because they live in fear of his punishment.

Now get this—when someone only talks about the Bible as an authority, irreligious people and religious people respond in exactly the same way— but for different reasons.

Irreligious people say, “The Bible is a law to obey—If I obey I'll miss out on so much!” Fear—Hmm? Or they say “The Bible is a law to obey—but I'm above all these religious hucksters.”—Pride.

It's the same. But Paul does not only tell us that the Scriptures are an authority to obey. Notice what he says in verse 16:

¹⁶ *All Scripture is breathed out by God*

The Scripture isn't just a law to obey, it's a conversation to enter into.

Alright, take a deep breath, we're going deep but we'll come back up for air in just a moment.

This is part of what makes Christianity so different than all the other worldviews.

There are worldviews that say, “God utterly transcends all things. He's completely other. You can't even get to know him. You just have his law! Obey it!”

The problem with a transcendence based worldview is that God is an authority but he's completely inaccessible on a personal level. You can't really know him.

There are worldviews that say, "God is immanent. He's so close that, in fact, he's within and flows through everything. In order to access him just realized that you are part of him and listen to yourself."

The problem with an immanence based worldview is that God is utterly personal, but he isn't an authority.

Christianity is the only worldview that says, "God is completely other. He's set apart. He's an authority. AND, he's immanent. He has spoken. He is the God who speaks, and enters into relationship with that which is not him."

God wants both. He wants you under his authority. He wants to enter into conversation with you. The Scriptures are his words spoken to you.

Irreligious people typically want relationship with no authority. I want to converse with God, but I don't want his authority. The problem with this, as we've already seen is that without authority you lose freedom, and without freedom you lose love. You actually lose the relationship.

Let me put it this way. If I say to my wife, "Honey, I want a relationship with you. But you can't make any claims on me. I'll come and go as I please. You have no authority to make requests in my life." How do you think that will go? The ring on my finger isn't there so that everyday I'll remember, "Oh yeah, I'm married. Almost forgot." It's a sign of the relationship, yes, but also of authority. When you say you want relationship without authority you lose freedom, and when you lose freedom you lose relationship.

Now, religious people love talk of God's authority, and they only view the Scriptures as an authority to be obeyed—but they never enter into relationship with God. The Scriptures are never a way to commune, abide, or rest. They're only a way to prop up their own opinions, prejudices, and comforts. Religious people obey the law of God, but not for God's sake—it's for their own sake. They obey, obey, obey but never move into the heart of their Father. God isn't a loving parent, but a driving taskmaster.

God wants both. He wants you to experience the freedom of coming under his authority. He wants you to hear the love in his words, spoken to you.

Ask yourself a few questions:

- Do I primarily approach the Bible as a source for answers, or as a conversation with a close friend?
- Do I read the Bible out of guilt or pleasure?
- Do I long for closeness with God, but neglect faithfulness?

Let me risk saying something a little edgy here: God's word will not be your prostitute. You can't have a relationship with God's word that's all intimacy and no faithfulness.

God's word will not be your sugar daddy. You can't have a relationship with God that butters God up with feigns intimacy through obedience—so that you can get what you want from him—and then forget about him when there's nothing you want.

God wants to betroth you to himself through his word. He wants intimacy and faithfulness. Not one or the other.

So how do we get it? Let's look, finally, at:

3. THE SALVATION OF AUTHORITY

Read verses 14 with me:

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All of us know that we haven't looked to God as our authority. We haven't desired intimacy with him.

Archbishop William Temple used to say, "**Your religion is what you do with your solitude.**"

What does he mean? Well, what do you think about when you have nothing to think about? When you're sitting at Starbucks waiting on someone where does your mind go? What does your mind habitually

go to? What do you daydream about? What gives you the most comfort to fantasize about? That's your god. Your religion is what you do with your solitude. Temple says, "Those are your God substitutes."

We all naturally look away from God to other things. So why would he initiate with us? We haven't obeyed his authority. We haven't longed for a relationship with him.

What makes him so persistent, and on what grounds do we deserve his loving communication to us? Paul says the sacred writings are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

What does that mean?

In his earthly life Jesus is the perfect picture of a human who both submitted to the authority of God, and he was intimate with the Father as no other human being was. Here's what that means:

Whenever Jesus read the law of God, he obeyed it. Not to manipulate God—but simply because he loved his Father. So he was fully under God's authority.

It also means that Jesus had perfect conversation with God as a human. The gospels show us what Jesus did with his solitude. When he wasn't preaching or performing miracles he would go to the temple and read the Word of God. Mark, for instance in his gospel, tells us that Jesus would frequently slip off from everyone into the mountains and spend the night meditating on Scripture and praying. Where did his mind go when he had nothing to do? He laid awake speaking with God.

And, when was lifted up on the cross he cried out, "It is finished." What did he mean by that? He meant—I've accomplished it. I have lived a life under God's authority. I've kept the law, I've fulfilled it."

You say, "Ok he kept the law. But what good is it if someone else kept the law? I'm the one who shook off God's authority! That may answer the question of how God could speak to Jesus, but it doesn't answer the question of how God can talk to me!"

Now hear this—here's the only human in history who deserved and earned an audience with God. And, on the cross, he cried out, "It is finished." And heaven was silent to the cries of the Son.

The one who John tells us was "The Word of God" received no word from God.

Why is it that God can speak to you, though you don't deserve it? It's because the one who had conversed with God from all eternity died in deafening silence.

As you read the Word of God you'll see that story played out over and over. It's foreshadowed, it's explained, it's extolled, it's alluded to:

Isaac Watts said:

**This is the field where, hidden, lies
The pearl of price unknown
That merchant is divinely wise
Who makes the pearl his own
Here consecrated water flows
To quench my thirst of sin
Here the fair tree of knowledge grows,
No danger dwells within.**

Read it as an authority to obey. Read it as a conversation with one who loves you to the uttermost. Hear it's words as God speaking into your soul.

Let's Pray.