

Rev. Seth D. Bode †† Sermon 461, 01-30-2022 †† Epiphany 4

“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.

“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.

2 TIMOTHY 3

¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.



Take a look at this great tool. It is a swiss army knife. It has many uses. There are a couple blades here—one big, one small—a screwdriver, a corkscrew. You name it, most Swiss army knives have it. It does many things. It has many uses. It is very versatile and it is made to fit nicely into your hand.

Now take a look at this tool. It's a book. Really, a library of books, written over 16 different centuries by 40-some writers, but only God as the Author. It has quite a bit to say. It's a simple tool, just paper and ink, a cover. But it turns out that this simple tool is anything but simplistic. It does many things. It has many uses. It is very versatile and it is made to fit nicely into your hand.

Does this tool ever intimidate you? By the end of this, I would really like you to become more comfortable to more often pick up and use this tool. There are so many ways God's Word fits into our lives—and our lives fit into God's Word. We don't have to wait for dreams and watch for signs. We don't need to work ourselves up or fall into a trance. For it is not some disembodied hand that moves us, but clear instructions and encouragement that conveys the Spirit of God. God has stepped into time and told us how He loves us and how He has rescued us! This book is ...

GOD'S HANDY WORD

1. Inspired if not admired

Paul wrote to a younger pastor named Timothy. Timothy grew up learning the Old Testament from his mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois. Later, when Paul visited the city of Lystra on his second mission journey, Timothy learned the message of Jesus Christ and the inspired Word of the New Testament, as Paul

taught it. So from the time Timothy was a baby (v15), he was a student in this powerful tool and well-versed in God's Word.

Paul's encouragement to Timothy was never to take that for granted and presume he knew it all. Instead, Timothy should "*continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of*" (v14).

A recurring theme for God's Word is rebuking and correcting. These are words of Law. The word "rebuking" involves reproof, convicting, and challenging error. It is an uncomfortable, confrontational word! But it describes God's Word frequently, and it shouldn't surprise us if we are off from time to time. God is in the habit of correcting even believers. When driving, it can be nice to have curbs and barriers to keep us from not only going off the road, but doing even worse damage. So in life, the only thing worse than God letting us sinfully bump the barriers is to not correct us, but let us go off the road and fall into the ditch of unbelief entirely.

The word for "correcting" is also a Law kind of word. It means setting right, setting straight, as if setting us upright on our feet. Again, if we were off balance, it's only handy for God to speak truth in time of uncertainty.

Don't forget "teaching" and "training." But it does not emphasize one field of study. It concerns itself with beyond righteousness. We learn the righteousness that comes from the Law is too lofty for us, but the righteousness that is by faith in the Son of God is free to us!

Yes, the Bible truly is a work to be **admired**. The reason is due to the fact that it is **inspired** by the Holy Spirit Himself. We do not mean to say that it's an inspirational work that should leave us all flabbergasted in applause. We mean much more than that. The Spirit Himself has breathed into this book every thought, even every word, so that you never need to doubt it. There is not a sorrow in the human heart but that God's Gospel has a word to give comfort in it. This is one proof that this good news was not made by man, but is the Word of God; for God alone knows all the ailings and needs of the soul.

Yet it is not always admired.

2. Required, but never retired

There are those who would like to see the Bible, or at least portions of it, **retired**. It's old hat, and old news. Maybe it spoke to people for a time, they may say, but not anymore. Or maybe it has two really nice tools, but the rest of the tools don't seem to make sense. Maybe it's time that we **retired** some parts of this tool, no?

Paul says no. For he knew the question was coming, so he gives Timothy a baseline: *²Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction... keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry* (v. 2,5). This is a sober assignment, one given to every pastor when ordained and installed as a servant of the Word. Equipped with its two teachings, law and gospel, the pastor knows just how to share God's Word with God's people.

The sober charge is also given to you, as part of Zion, the Church, who have been called to spread the message in your own station of life. No matter who we are, the task is not to slice and dice God's Word in the way we see fit. We aren't asked to juice it up or tone it down a notch. We are given the tool with all its uses.

If we see resistance to God's Word around us, even within us, we shouldn't be surprised. St. Paul anticipated in 2 Timothy, the last book, chronologically speaking, that he wrote. *³For the time will come when people 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. ⁴They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths*" (3-4).

"Itching" ears could also be rendered "ticklish" ears. It is a word often used figuratively to mean curiosity. Here, it is a curiosity that is satisfied with false teaching instead of sound teaching.

But Paul says that God's Word is not a feather-duster. It isn't a backscratcher and it doesn't have a massage option. It doesn't tickle or massage. It works the way the Holy Spirit has designed it to work.

And "ticklish" ears have come along. Ebionites (100s) *taught that Jesus became the Christ by practicing the Law of God.* Adoptionism (300s) *taught that God the Father adopted the Son, because He had used the Father's divine power faithfully.* *Has this idea died? No, the Unitarians still teach that the incarnation*

applies to all of us. Every social worker and lover of the other is a savior, as if we can become Jesus. Sounds nice.

Nestorianism (400s) separated Jesus Christ into 2 persons, like two boards glued together at Christmas. Have these ears been satisfied? No, many Christians today separate Jesus into two when they teach that Jesus' body and blood couldn't possibly be present in and with the bread and wine.

Academic scholarship teaches the Bible is just each human writer's impression of what God revealed to each writer, and not God's words in every instance.

Megachurches teach that we should take a poll of what people want to hear, and only teach that from the Bible. The most desperate churches are more concerned about your physical health than what really matters, your spiritual health. I cannot tell you how many ticklish churches say, "Let's decide what to preach on Sunday, and then find the verse that fits our agenda."

"Ticklish ears" have come and will keep coming. In addressing errors, let's not forget to rebuke and correct our own urges to be tickled. Our own inner sinner looks for tickles and giggles just to keep us from sound words.

Then let's find encouragement, comfort, and hope in God's most versatile tool. Let's train in righteousness. I imagine the ears of our Savior tickled and itched when the blood ran down from His satirical crown of thorns. But His hands were too busy, stretched in love for the sin of the world, to scratch and satisfy the feeling. His will was far too closely aligned to that of His Father to unpin His hand from the cross now. He was always more sensitive to the work He had to do than to live out His days just for itches and tickles. He spent His life for your sins just so you would have the truth. What God would take away the sins of these miserable, sinful wretches?

His Word first and foremost says, "You are forgiven for your sinful tickles and itches." For God has much more than a tickle and an itch for you. He has unprecedented, unearned, unconditional love for you. Open your heart to everything God has to say, even the difficult, confrontational stuff. What God has to say is **required** reading, even if it is not admired or desired. What God has to say outlasts the whole world. What God has to say speaks volumes to your forgiven heart. **Amen.**

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**