THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

**"A Light Unto Our Path"**

Rev. Doug Kuiper

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Dear Radio Friends,

We all know that life confronts us with many decisions. Decisions about marriage or career, perhaps. Even more, decisions about issues of faith and morality. What guides you in making your decisions? Is it your feelings, or the popular opinion of the day, or what your parents taught you? Feelings and popular opinions are no reliable guide for us in making our decisions. They change. They have no substance and no basis for forming a mature opinion. Even parents could mislead us. We need something sure and dependable, something that will guide us infallibly. That something is holy Scripture, the word of God.

When our parents, friends, or teachers use Scripture as their guide and then give us advice on the basis of Scripture, we know that we can follow their advice.

There was a young man who, by the inspiration of God, wrote Psalm 119. He made it his personal confession that the Scriptures were his guide. We want to make this our confession, too. That young man says in Psalm 119:105, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”

What does it mean that the Scriptures are a light unto our path? Even more, first of all, why is it necessary to have such a light? It is the idea of a *pathway* that helps us understand the necessity. Then, think of a *dark* pathway. If you walk through the forest at night, you realize your need for a light that will guide you. For, in a forest at night, walking down a pathway, you face dangers. First of all, there is the danger of being disoriented, losing your sense of direction. Especially if a path is not familiar, that is a danger. Without a landmark or a light to keep us orientated, we will get lost.

Another danger in walking down a path is that there might be an object in that path over which we stumble. A log may lie in the way. In the dark of night, without a light to guide us, we cannot see the dangers ahead. So we use lights to guide us in actual earthly life.

Now the psalmist uses that reality and applies it to his spiritual walk, for it is his spiritual pathway that he refers to when he says, “My feet … my path.” Of course, no earthly flashlight will help us down a spiritual pathway. Nor is Scripture going to help us know what way to go on a physical, earthly pathway. When the psalmist speaks of his path in our text, he is referring to his life from the viewpoint of it being a spiritual pathway.

Life is like a pathway. It is like a pathway because it is laid out very carefully and determined for us. All of the events of life that we face are trials. And our decisions are like walking down a pathway and encountering difficulties — coming to crossroads at which we must make a decision whether to turn right or left or go straight ahead.

Life is like a pathway, especially our spiritual life, because it has also a destination. The destination of our spiritual life is the glory of God in all that we do, and then that, in the way of glorifying Him, and by His grace, we be brought to heaven. That is the desire of the child of God — that he go to heaven, and that he glorify God in all his life.

But there is much darkness in our life, and dangers lurk. There is spiritual darkness because we walk this pathway in the midst of an evil, sinful world. All around us are threats to our faith and morality. All around us the world, and Satan using the world, tempts us to depart from the path of righteousness, to put off the glory of God, and to serve our own lusts. So the danger is that we become disoriented spiritually as we walk throughout our life. Adam did that when he fell into sin. He knew, in the state of perfection, how to glorify God. But having fallen into sin, he became spiritually disoriented in this sense: he lost the ability to serve and glorify God. A danger would be, as we walk the spiritual pathway, that we stumble, that is, that we fall into the pit of sin, that we do what God tells us not to do.

These dangers that we face are not merely *hypothetical* dangers, and not even *potential* dangers, but they are *real* dangers. As the child of God goes through life trying to determine how he can best glorify God, he will face the dangers of which we have spoken. Therefore it is important that we have a light to guide us.

That light, which the psalmist claims to use for his guidance, is the word of God. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”

Thy word! The word of God is the speech or the revelation of God. The psalmist has in mind, however, that word, not as he heard it spoken, but even more as he had it written. He has in mind the law of God. Psalm 119 is a psalm in which the idea of God’s law is central. Different words are used throughout the psalm to refer to God’s law: thy word, thy testimonies, thy ways, thy commandments, thy judgments, thy precepts, thy statutes. But regardless of the word the psalmist uses, he has in mind the law of God. And he speaks of that word of God (the law of God) as being the revelation of God to him regarding truth. “Thy word is truth.” It was Jesus who said that in John 17:17. But the psalmist had an understanding of that concept. The word of God is true and dependable.

It is that word of God, now, which is his guide along his dark pathway. The question is: Why is it the word of God, as opposed to anything else, that will help us in these issues of faith and morality and any other decision we have to make? It is because God knows best. This is God’s word. God, the all-knowing and wise and perfect; God, the God who has determined what is sin and what is righteousness; God, the God who is sovereign over the enemy and, therefore, knows what lies ahead on our pathway and knows the tactics that the enemy will use — God is best equipped to guide us. The word of God, therefore, is a dependable and trustworthy guide because God is a dependable and trustworthy God. He does not lie, but He speaks the truth. When He gives us direction on how to live, we receive that direction with gratitude and live in accordance with it, because we know He alone can see ahead in the darkness of our spiritual life.

But then, if the word of God is to be our guiding light, we must say that nothing else will guide us, and we will not turn to anything else. How quickly, though, we turn to the world’s ideas, to the advice columnists in the newspapers, to the world’s wisdom, and try from them to learn how to succeed in life and how to make the right decisions.

If we would take to heart that the world itself is sinful, that the world is an essential aspect of the darkness of the pathway on which we walk, then we would realize that the world and men, of themselves, cannot provide us with our leadership. Men are, of themselves, liars and more vain than vanity itself. The Belgic Confession says, in Article 7, underscoring that very fact, that we cannot depend on men to give us guidance. The word of God is sufficient. The word of God will surely guide us in all of our life. And it will do so in a way that we can rely on. As I said earlier, and I repeat again, this does not rule out that we might have to turn to other human beings for advice. The psalmist may have had to turn to his father or mother or to other members of the Christian faith and community for advice. But what he realized was this, that only when others brought him advice based on the word of God was that advice reliable and worthy of being followed.

Do you have troubles in your marriage? Do you want to make your marriage better? Do you have troubles raising your children? Do you want to know how to be the best parent that you can be? The word of God is a reliable guide there. Do you have troubles fighting a certain sin in your life? Do you find that so often you fail to stand up to temptation? It is the word of God which will serve you as a reliable and trustworthy light to fight the temptations you face. Are there questions you have about what career to go into or whom to date? The word of God will not tell you specifically what career to go into or whom to date. It does not *make* our decisions for us. But it will set down principles to guide us.

How does the word of God function, then, as a guide in our life? It does so in two different ways. First of all, it functions as a guide in our life because, in certain areas, it does give pointed and specific direction regarding how we must live. The law and the commands of God are specific. When we think of the law of God, we have in mind the ten commandments, first of all — Thou shalt have no other gods before me; thou shalt not bow down thyself to any graven image; thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy; honor thy father and thy mother; thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness; thou shalt not covet. Now, what makes that direction so pointed and specific is the words “Thou shalt not!” God, in His law, shows us very clearly what way we are not to go, what kind of decisions we may not make in life. This is light and guidance. For what the law forbids us to do is what we want to do by nature. The world advises us to commit fornication. Advice columnists in the newspapers will not tell us to “abstain from fornication” (1 Thess. 4:3). But God says, “No!” The wise man, Solomon, by inspiration of God, makes the same point. Having spoken in Proverbs 6 of an adulterous woman who desires to seduce a man and to lead him astray from the path of godliness, and who will surely have her way unless that man seeks the law of God for direction, Solomon reminds us in verses 23 and 24: “For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life: To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman.”

Because the law of God is so clear, it must be followed. Think of a sailor in charge of steering a ship, who sees a lighthouse telling him what way to use and guiding him into the harbor, a very dangerous harbor to enter because of rocks all around it. If that ship were to dash itself on the rocks, there would be sure destruction. Think, now, of the foolishness of that sailor if, seeing the lighthouse, he decides to ignore it. He will decide for himself what is the best way to get the ship into the harbor — with the consequence that the ship is dashed into pieces. So is the child of God. When he has the law and the word of God to tell him very clearly what not to do and what to do, then he is foolish if he does not rely on it, but seeks his own way of finding guidance and seeks to follow his own feelings and his own intuition. God gives us, in the word of God, specific direction in certain areas of life.

But then, the word of God functions as a guide in our lives also by setting forth principles by which we govern our lives. As we said earlier, the word of God will not tell us what kind of work we should undertake or whom to take for our spouse. But the word of God gives principles. We are to work. Scripture makes that clear. It is good to have a spouse. Scripture tells us that. In our work we must not work on the Lord’s day. “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God” (Ex. 20:8-10). The child of God, then, who wants to please God in his work, will not accept that job or position which requires him to work on Sunday, the Lord’s day, in an area that is not one of absolute necessity for life.

The Scriptures give principles on Christian stewardship: how should I spend my money in this or that area of my life? Scripture will not say, “You may buy this; you must not buy that,” in so many words. But when we know that God has given us our money to use to the glory of His name; when we know that we must not spend that money on anything that is contrary to the law of God; when we know also that the causes of His kingdom require the support that we can give them by money and resources — then we have some principles by which we can govern our lives. Now, because these principles are not spelled out in detail, the child of God must know his Scripture carefully, thoroughly, and accurately to use these principles in his life. But if we study Scripture regularly, we will become more adept at applying these principles to our life. The more a person uses a map, the more he knows the various routes on the map and the ones that best serve his purpose. The more the child of God studies Scripture, the more he knows what Scripture requires of him and how best to serve and glorify God in a way consistent with scriptural principles.

Therefore, there is in our text an implied command, “Be guided by Scripture. Use it as your light. Search it daily and find in it the wisdom you need as a child of God.”

But our text does not consist of a command so much as it consists of a confession: “Thy word *is* a lamp unto *my* feet, and a light unto *my* path.” That is a confession of the child of God, and it says something not only about the role Scripture plays in his life (it *is* his guide), but it says something also about his view of Scripture itself. He understands Scripture to be very clearly the word of God: “Thy word.” Is that your view of holy Scripture — the word of God? Completely the word of God? Without error the word of God? The psalmist, in speaking of the place Scripture plays in his life, says of Scripture by implication that it is a clear guide. It is a light. Light is always clear. It will not leave him in doubt. He says, by implication, that it is a trustworthy guide — it will lead him to his destination. “I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments,” he says in verse 106. He will keep the law of God because he knows it will bring him to the destination he seeks — the glory of God and, as regards himself, his being brought to heaven.

Do you make the same confession, then? Not only that Scripture *does* guide you, but that Scripture is your *only* guide? And do you make that same confession with a very high view of Scripture? Scripture as the word of God will surely lead me to my destination. We cannot make that confession of ourselves. The old man of sin in every one of us will never say, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet.” The old man of sin in us will despise the word of God. Therefore, to make this confession, we need the grace of the Holy Spirit working in us to understand that what the psalmist confesses is in fact truth. There is no more reliable guide than the word of God.

Dear radio listener, may you find that to be true in your life!

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for giving us Thy word, and we pray for the grace of the Spirit to understand it and to use it rightly in our life in this coming week and until Thou dost take us to be with Thee in glory. Bless us and forgive our sins in Christ’s name, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

**"Its Author"**

Rev. Doug Kuiper

*August 10, 2003; No. 3158*

Dear radio friends,

Last week we examined the confession of the psalmist, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path,” and we noticed that the psalmist believed Scripture to be the word of God. What did he mean when he called Scripture the word of God? In what sense is it the word *of* God? Is it the word *about* God? Certainly that is true. Scripture reveals Jehovah God. But even more, and what makes it possible that Scripture is the word about God, is the fact that Scripture is the word that God *wrote,* that originated with God, the word of which God is the author. That, especially, is what we mean when we call it the word of God.

It is important to understand and believe that God is the author of Scripture, first of all, because when we know the author of a book, we have already an idea of the value of it. That is true of any book we read in everyday life. Knowing various authors and the kind of writing they put out, we can look at a cover and judge the book. Even though we are often advised not to “judge a book by its cover,” there are indeed times when that very thing is possible. So, with Scripture, if we know that God is the author, we already have an idea of the value of the book. Believing that God is the one only true God, and that He speaks truth, we know that this book will speak truth.

Therefore, secondly, it is important to know that God is the author of Scripture because that will give us an understanding of the trustworthiness of the book. When the psalmist spoke of Scripture being a lamp unto his feet and a light upon his pathway, then he spoke of it being a trustworthy and reliable guide. And that it is, because it is the word of God.

What is our starting point today as we speak of Scripture being the word of God and being authored by God? Our starting point is the point of faith. Scripture says it is the word of God, and we believe what Scripture says. Generally, we do believe it when a book tells who its author is. Very rarely do we question that the author of the book is, in fact, the person whose name appears in print on the cover. And that is true of us with regard to Scripture, too. We need not question the authorship of Scripture when we are told that God wrote it. However, our faith is not a merely blind faith. We know that God wrote it and that when God said He wrote it He was right, because the things which Scripture prophesies of are coming to pass. No man could have foreseen everything that would happen in time and history. Scripture must be written by God.

This, now, is the teaching of the apostle Peter, by inspiration, in II Peter 1:20, 21: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” Here Peter teaches us of the authorship of holy Scripture. Notice, first, that he is speaking of the origin of Scripture. “No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man.” In old time, prophecies originated already. Centuries ago there were prophecies that were later recorded in Scripture. Prophecy is, of course, a matter of speech, first of all. Peter says that “holy men of God *spake* as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” But these prophecies were written down. And the word “Scripture” does mean “writings.” So Peter has in mind the coming of Scripture, the origin of Scripture; and not just any one part of Scripture, but he has in mind *all* of Scripture. Even though it is true that in the day in which he wrote, the Scripture was not completed yet, still he has in mind all the Scriptures, the holy writings that the people of God had at that time. “No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.” He has in mind the whole of Scripture.

Understanding that Peter is speaking of Scripture’s origin, we notice, in the second place, that he is very clear on this point: Man was passive in writing the Scriptures. To say that God is the author of Scripture does not require us to deny that men were used to write Scripture. The text says as much. “Holy men of God spake.” And we know ourselves that the apostle Peter, as he writes these words, is writing Scripture. Scripture is clear that David wrote many of the psalms; that Isaiah is the human being through whom the prophecy of Isaiah came; that Paul was the human through whom many of the epistles were written. Most of the books identify the human instrument. We are not denying that men were *used* to write Scripture when we say that God is the author of Scripture. But what we mean is that the words and ideas of Scripture (notice that — not merely the ideas but the words also) did not originate with men. Verse 20 says, “[N]o prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.” That is our first proof that the words, the ideas, and the impulse to write Scripture did not originate in men. For when Peter says in verse 20 that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, he does not mean (by inspiration, of course) simply to teach that no man may think he understands Scripture and that others do not. It is true, sometimes, that a minority of men have the correct understanding of Scripture. But Peter’s point is that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private explaining, and that no aspect of Scripture is the private idea of the men who wrote it. Do not go to Peter and ask Peter to explain what he meant. Do not go to Isaiah and ask Isaiah to explain what he meant. For the men who wrote these Scriptures, the human instruments, were not giving their own ideas.

The second aspect found in the text that supports the idea that the words, ideas, and impulse to write did not originate with man is that Peter says it in so many words: “the prophecy came not in old time *by the will of man.”* Peter, Paul, and Isaiah did not wake up one day and say, “I think I’ll write a book that God’s people in every age will read and remember.” The writing of Scripture was not due to their will. Just as salvation is not due to the will of man (we read in Romans 9:16, “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy”); just as the sending of Christ into the human flesh was not due to the will of the virgin Mary (God told her what He was going to do, He did not ask her permission or her agreement); so also with Scripture. The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man. The wills of the human instruments were not a factor here.

Then, thirdly, we see in the text that the words, ideas, and impulse to write were not of man by this sentence: “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” Now that word “moved” is used in other Scriptures to refer to a ship being borne on the wind. It is not the will of the ship itself or the pilot of the ship, it is not any activity of the ship that moves that ship along. It is the wind. The ship is passive. So this passage teaches very clearly that though God used human instruments to write His Scriptures, these men were passive in that regard.

What a contrast is the idea of so many men today that there is in Scripture a human element: not just that God *used* men to write His Scriptures, but that men had a say in what was written; that man is, perhaps, called rightly the co-author of Scripture; that the substance of Scripture is partly due to God and partly due to man; or that God gave men the ideas to write, but men wrote them in their own words — the substance is God’s and the form is man’s. It does not matter how you explain the idea of a human element. Either way, you end up with this: man was not just *used,* man was not merely *moved* by the Spirit, but man was actively involved in the writing of Scripture. That idea, the word of God in our text rules out very clearly: “[T]he prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

What the text underscores positively, then, is God’s activity in the writing of Scripture. The text makes clear that the speaking of the prophecy of Scripture, and then also the writing of those prophecies, is the work of God *alone.* For that Holy Ghost who moved the men of God to speak and write is God.

And that this is the work of God is made clear from the fact that there is a very evident shift in emphasis in the original: "For the prophecy came *not* in old time by the will of man: *but* holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." The text speaks of the wonder of inspiration. We have not used that word before, but it is a very important word and a crucial concept to understand. The word “inspiration” means that God, by the work of the Holy Spirit, guided men so that what they wrote was not their own word but God’s word. That is not the way we use the word inspiration today. We speak of being “inspired” to do something — having the idea or incentive. That is not at all what our text means. We have already shown that man was passive. The word “inspiration,” as we use it with application to the writing of Scripture, means that the Holy Spirit guided the men of God so that what they wrote was not their word, but God’s.

A most important question, then, is, How did this inspiration take place? That is an important question, because some also go wrong here. Trying to do justice to the idea that Scripture is entirely the word of God, they might say that the humans who wrote Scripture were merely writing down what God dictated. That is not at all true. We can see from Scripture too that when Paul writes he writes out of his own experiences and in accordance with his own personality. As David wrote Psalm 23, he was surely not simply writing down what God was dictating in his ear, but he was writing of his own experience and his confession and what he believed to be true. It is not the case, then, that inspiration took place mechanically.

And yet, at the same time, we have to guard against the ideas of some who say that while David was living, or while Paul was living, God had an idea of some truth He wanted to convey to His people, and so He looked around to see who would be the best person to use to convey that truth and decided to pick here a David and there a Paul and there a Peter, using the best means He had at His disposal. Let us not go in that direction either.

How did the Spirit work in men so that what they wrote, while manifesting their own personalities and their own experiences of life, was word-for-word, without error, the word of God? To answer the question, we have to think of the truth of God’s sovereignty. God, from all eternity, sovereignly determined everything that should happen in time and history. He sovereignly determined everything that relates to the salvation of His church. Therefore, He sovereignly determined to write His Scripture, to make Himself known to His people in Jesus Christ by way of the written word. This is the matter of God’s sovereignty.

From all eternity, He determined every part of Scripture that should be written — the sixty-six different books. And He determined that these books would be of a different type — some in the form of a letter to a church, some in the form of recounting history, some poetry. He determined also that these books should be written by different writers in order to emphasize that when written by different writers, yet speaking one and the same truth, the author of this book must be none other than God.

God, having determined that from all eternity, raised up in His providence a David. And in order that David write Psalm 23, which God had determined from all eternity that David would do, God caused David first to become a shepherd. God determined that He should use a Paul to speak to the church of the suffering that the church will have to endure. In order to prepare and equip Paul to do that, God determined that Paul should suffer many things for the gospel — including beatings and imprisonment. God raised up and prepared the men He wanted to write His Scriptures, and governed every aspect of their lives in order that what they wrote expressed their own personality and followed from their own experiences, but was, for all that, the word of God.

How can that be? If to this point you have not been satisfied with the answer, then we have to say it is a miracle! No less is this a miracle (the inspiration of Scripture) than was God sending Christ into our flesh and raising up a virgin Mary to be the instrument He used to that end. No less is this a miracle than God deciding to save us, working by His Holy Spirit in our hearts, and taking all the credit for the work of salvation. So Scripture, and the inspiration of Scripture, is a wonder and a miracle of God.

Know this first, dear radio listeners, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Know that first. For if you know that first, you will understand why Scripture is absolutely trustworthy. The apostle Peter spoke to the saints of that in verse 19: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.” A more sure word of prophecy!

How can the people to whom Peter writes know that he speaks the truth? Peter is warning the church against doctrinal error, including those errors related to the second coming of Jesus Christ. And he is also warning them against the licentious living, the sinful living, that such errors lead to. How can the people to whom he writes know that his warnings are to be taken to heart? He emphasizes the trustworthiness of what he says, first of all, by saying that he was there on the Mount of Transfiguration when he heard God say of Christ: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” But then Peter says, “Don’t believe what I write just for that reason. We have a more sure word. What I write,” Peter means to be saying to the church, “is in accordance with all of Scripture. And no part of Scripture is the work or the product of the will of man.” Scripture is the word of God. That makes Scripture a faithful guide. And that makes the words that Peter writes by inspiration true for us as well.

Peter exhorts the saints, then, “whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place.” Remember last week we spoke of the need for Scripture as a light to shine on our dark pathway? Peter says, “Knowing that Scripture is the word of God, you can trust it reliably to guide you to your destination. You do well to take heed to Scripture.”

May God grant every one of us grace to confess that Scripture is His word alone and to take heed to it.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we pray that by Thy Holy Spirit Thou wilt convict us of the truth of that which Thy word speaks, and cause us to give all glory and honor to Thy name for it. Enable us to take heed to those Scriptures and not to turn aside from what they tell us, to the glory of Thy name and for Christ’s sake, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

**"Scripture’s Authority and Profit"**

Rev. Doug Kuiper

*August 17, 2003; No. 3163*

Dear radio friends,

Last week we explained that God is the author of Scripture: that the words, ideas, and even the impulse to write Scripture were not due to the will of men, but to the will and the work of God. Therefore, Scripture is trustworthy.

Today we examine another text that speaks of God’s being the author of Scripture and of the trustworthiness of Scripture. This text spells out areas in which Scripture is profitable and trustworthy. In fact, we see from this text that it is profitable for all of faith and life. It is important to remember once more that it is Scripture that is profitable and trustworthy in every area of faith and life. The decrees and councils and church bodies of men, the opinions of individual men — none of these will build us up in faith and godliness. But the Scriptures give us wisdom unto salvation.

That is the word that the apostle Paul, by inspiration, wrote to the young pastor Timothy in II Timothy 3:16, 17: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

I call your attention, then, to the authority and profit of holy Scripture. Notice that the text teaches that this is due to the fact that the Scriptures are God-breathed: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God.” Last week we explained what the word “inspiration” means when used in reference to the writing of the Scriptures — not that men were inspired in the sense of having a bright idea by themselves or motivated of themselves to do something, the way we would use the word “inspiration”; but the Holy Spirit worked in the hearts of men in such a way that what they wrote was word-for-word the word of God. That is inspiration. Now, in our text the word “inspiration” is used as the explanation of the origin of Scripture: “All scripture is given by *inspiration* of God.” But that word “inspiration” means literally, “God-breathed, inspired, the Spirit working in, the breath of God.” That is the explanation for the origin of the Scriptures as Paul explains it to Timothy.

Some say that when our text says that all Scripture is inspired or God-breathed, it means that all Scripture breathes of God. If that is true, then the text does not teach the doctrine of the inspiration and origin of Scripture, but merely that Scripture’s content is that of God. It tells us about God. That, however, is not the explanation of the term as we find it in our text. But the word is active: it refers to what God did — God breathed. That is inspiration: His Spirit, His breath. He works in Scripture itself, and He worked in those men whom He used to write Scripture. That one same Spirit and that one same breath of God worked in Moses and in David, in Paul and in Peter, and in many different men. But it was always one God, one Spirit, breathing one breath.

Recall now that fact that when Adam was created and formed out of the dust of the ground, the Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. The breath of God gives life. So we see that the Scriptures are living. Not the books, not our translations, not the papers that we have Scripture written on, not even the original documents, but the word of God of which Scripture consists is living. The writer to the Hebrews said, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). The word of God is that! That ascribes to the word of God personal powers. To be able to know a person’s heart and thoughts — that is something only another person could do. **That is the word of God. It is quick, it is alive, it is powerful**. Also I Peter 1:23 speaks of the fact that the Word of God is living: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, *by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*”

This Word of God, therefore, is alive. It is alive because it is the breath of God. That is Scripture. In what sense is it alive? It is alive in the sense that it gives you and me spiritual life. It strengthens us unto our spiritual life. It is alive in the sense that, when we read Scripture in faith (the Spirit working in our hearts), we find it to be true not only that Scripture speaks to us of the living God, but also that through the Scriptures the living God Himself speaks to us.

When we understand that all Scripture is God-breathed, that God worked in the hearts of men to write Scripture and therefore they wrote His word and it speaks of Him, then we understand that Scripture is authoritative.

God is our Creator. We owe Him gratitude and life-service because He has created us. God is also our Redeemer. He has forgiven sinners such as we are, renewed us by His Holy Spirit. And this God, who is our Creator and our Redeemer, will also be our Judge. He will return, in Christ, in the day of judgment to judge us for what we have done, so that Paul goes on in chapter 4 to tell Timothy, “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word” (vv. 1, 2a).

Because God is Creator, Redeemer, and Judge, we know it is our duty to please Him in all that we think, say, and do. But we also know that we are not able, because of our own sinfulness, to please Him in everything. Therefore He gives us His word. He gives it authoritatively, for He breathed His life into it. And that word speaks of our salvation and guides us in knowing how to please Him. It is authoritative.

The question would be then: In what areas does it have profit? The text lists four different areas: for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.

Doctrine, first of all. Teaching and instruction, that which so many pooh-pooh today, is most important, and Scripture has authority to teach it. Doctrine is a matter of our salvation. Salvation requires us to know. Jesus says in John 17:3, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” Salvation is a matter of knowing true doctrine. It is not just a matter of having head knowledge, but fellowship with God in the way of knowing Him. Then again, Jesus said in John 8:32, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” True freedom is enjoyed in the way of knowing doctrine. So Scripture is profitable for supplying our need to know doctrine, for Scripture is God’s revelation to us. He tells us who He is and what we must know for salvation. He does not mislead us or tell us lies. He tells us the truth. And He tells us that truth sufficiently. All that we need to know for doctrine is set forth in Scripture. Scripture has authority and is profitable for us to grow in our knowledge of God.

Secondly, it is profitable for reproof. To reprove is to show someone his errors. And how greatly we need to be shown our errors, for not only are we prone to error, not only is there the real danger that we do fall into error with regard to doctrine and life, but, in fact, we err every day. Every day we commit sin, which is error against God. And if we are not reproved for those errors, then we are being left on the path to destruction. Those who do not love God and who walk contrary to His law will be destroyed in the day of Jesus Christ. God provides, then, for our reproof. And He gives us a reproof in Scripture. For Scripture points out the errors of our life. Remember last time we referred to the law of God and how it tells us “thou shalt,” and “thou shalt not.” In telling us what we should not do, Scripture reminds us of our sins and points out our sins; Scripture reminds us that what we should not do is that which we, by nature, want to do and would certainly do. Scripture, therefore, is a means God uses to reprove.

In the third place, Scripture is profitable for correction. Correction is the positive part of reproof. Reproof shows one his error. And when one has knowledge of his error, when one has seen that he is fallen, then one needs direction in how to get out of that error and be restored. We are not able to correct ourselves in our own strength. But Scripture is profitable for correction. The way of correction for sin is sorrow for that sin and repentance, seeking forgiveness in Jesus Christ. The way of correction of wrong teaching is to see the true teaching in Scripture and to renounce what we formerly thought as our own imaginations and to bow before the word of God. In the way of that correction God enables us to enjoy the covenant relationship with Him that He has in mind for His people. We can see that this profit of Scripture is very necessary for us.

Fourthly, Scripture is profitable for instruction in righteousness. The idea of instruction is that which a parent gives a child. Much is involved in the training of a child — attending not just to the physical needs of the child, but to his emotional and developmental needs and, for the godly family, to his spiritual needs. The goal in the training of a child is that he become mature and use the teaching that his parents give him as a way in which he can grow in maturity and then himself, one day, be able to live without the reminders of parents. God’s word does that to us. We are the children. We are children of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. But as children, we do need instruction in how to live. And Scripture gives us that instruction. We have already said that it gives us reproof and correction, but the point of this phrase, “instruction in righteousness,” is that it brings us to spiritual maturity. That was the word that the apostle Paul said to Timothy, too, in the verses just prior to our text: “[C]ontinue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (vv. 14, 15). It is an adult who is wise. I did not say *every* adult is wise. But most often an adult who has taken to heart what he has been taught as a youth is a wise person. So Paul is telling Timothy that the Scriptures are able to make him spiritually mature, wise unto salvation through Christ, because they are profitable not only for doctrine, for reproof, and for correction, but also for instruction in righteousness.

Having set forth these four areas in which Scripture is profitable and authoritative, we should understand that by these four things God through Paul means to teach that **Scripture is profitable for all of life**. There are some who say, “But Scripture is not a history book; Scripture is not a geography book; Scripture is not a science book.” While it is true, of course, that Scripture does not set forth the principles that children need to learn with regard to history and geography, the fact is that in Scripture there is historical fact, geographical fact, and scientific fact taught. And those facts which are taught in Scripture are those things necessary to know for salvation. In saying that Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, God is teaching us that His word has authority and is profitable to regulate all our faith and life. As regards the living of a spiritual life to the glory of God, with our eye on heaven, there is no document we need to turn to besides the Scriptures.

Let us use them to that end.

If it is sin that we face, let us turn to the Scriptures. If it is false doctrine that we are confronted with, let us refute it with the Scriptures. For all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for these areas: doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.

Then the question arises, What is the purpose of Scripture having this profit? Paul answers that question of Timothy in verse 17: “That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” When Scripture uses the word “perfect,” as it does in our verse, it does not mean perfect in the sense of sinless. Noah is called “perfect” (Gen. 6:9). Of Job we read that he was perfect. We know, however, that these men were sinners so long as they were on earth. When Scripture uses the word “perfect,” it refers not to one who is without sin, but to a person or a thing that is well fitted for a certain use. When Paul says that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, he says in essence this: **Scripture has the purpose of preparing man to do good works** (not every man, but the man of God).

What are good works, then? Good works are those that "proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to His glory" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 91). It is not our purpose to elaborate greatly on that description of good works now. But no work can be truly good that is not done out of faith. No work can be called truly good when it is done in violation of God’s law. And no work can be called truly good when it is done for the glory of man rather than God.

To do good works is the calling of the child of God in gratitude for the salvation that God has given. How do I find in myself the ability to do good works? I do not. I am a sinner. God gives it by His Spirit. But is there some means that His Spirit uses that enables me to know what good works are and motivates me to do them? Yes, it is the word of God — profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, with this as the purpose: that the man of God may know how to do all good works and be equipped to do those works.

That purpose of God He will accomplish in every man of God. Who is a man of God? He is a man whom God has chosen to be His own. He is a new person in Jesus Christ. But then he is a man who loves God in response and who studies the Scriptures. He is a man, therefore, who desires to please God and to show gratitude to God. And that man, as he goes through life, wonders, what do I have as a standard by which to judge my works, because I would have them be works of genuine gratitude to God? The answer to that man is: God gives the Scriptures, breathed of God, and therefore the Word of God Himself.

Trustworthy, profitable, in every area of life.

Do you study Scripture that way? Do you approach it as something that will surely help you today in your spiritual journey? Do you believe Scripture is the word of God and His word alone? Your answer to those questions will determine whether you have a right to the name “a man of God,” or not.

That one who is conscious of all that God has done for him in making him His child uses the Scriptures as the rule of gratitude and finds profit in it in every area of life. May you find that to be true.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, how seldom we use the Scriptures rightly. How imperfectly we use them. How often our concern in reading them is not to become wise unto salvation or to find profit, instruction, and correction in them, but merely to satisfy what we feel to be a duty we owe Thee, a mere outward duty. We pray, grant us grace to study Scripture from our hearts and to find in it the wisdom unto salvation through the faith in Christ that it gives. For we believe this: the Scriptures are Thy word. Be glorified in all our life. For Christ’s sake we pray, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

**"Scripture—Its Completeness"**

Rev. Doug Kuiper

*August 24, 2003; No. 3164*

Dear radio friends,

The believing child of God considers the Scriptures to be sufficient to guide him in all matters of doctrine and of life. Last week we saw that from II Timothy 3:15-16, where we read that the Scriptures are sufficient to make the child of God wise unto salvation through faith in Christ. We were told, moreover, that those Scriptures are sufficient to govern us in all of our life — areas of faith (they were profitable for doctrine) and areas of life (for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness).

This week the passage we consider speaks also of the sufficiency of Scripture, that is, of its being enough (we need nothing more). It does so by teaching that Scripture is the complete revelation of God. It is enough because there is no more. The word that we consider today is found in Revelation 22:18, 19 : “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

At the outset, it is important that we understand that these words are not simply the words of John as he writes by inspiration. We have here the direct words of Christ to John, which John wrote down. In other words, the “I” who testifies these things in verse 18 is not John assuring the people of God that God will do this, but it is Jesus Christ Himself. That is clear especially from verse 20: “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly.” The church then prays, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

That is also clear from the fact that throughout the chapter Jesus has spoken directly, and John has written down what Jesus spoke. When the “I” through the chapter is John, he makes it clear, as he does, for instance, in verse 8: “And I John saw these things, and heard them.”

The “I” of our text, therefore, is Jesus Christ. Because it is Jesus Christ speaking, the child of God understands how serious the warning is. Now, even if it were only John speaking or writing by inspiration, we would still understand the warning to be very serious. But it is Jesus Christ Himself saying to the church, basically, “The revelation I have given you is all you need — nothing more and nothing less. And to him who looks for more or takes away from what has been given, there will be judgment.”

That prohibition applies, first of all, to the book of Revelation. “I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book.” It is, first of all, the book of Revelation that Jesus has in mind. The book of Revelation is a book that Jesus Christ revealed to John the apostle on the Isle of Patmos. It sets forth all that would characterize the history of the New Testament. It does not do this, of course, by telling us that at such-and-such a date this would happen, and on another date that would happen. But in the book of Revelation Jesus gives the church, through the apostle John, the broad picture of what will characterize the New Testament as He, Jesus Christ, governs all things at the right hand of God to realize the decree and the purposes of God. We have in the book of Revelation a complete picture, therefore, of the history of the New Testament. So Jesus is saying to the church as regards the history of the New Testament and everything that will be true of the church in the world: “Until I return, this is all you need to know, nothing more. But you need to know *all* of this, nothing less.”

But the words apply also to all of Scripture. We do not say that merely because these words are found at the very end of Scripture. That is, in God’s providence, true. At the very end of Scripture, the fourth and third-to-the-last verses of all Scripture, we have a warning against adding to or taking from the words written in the book. Interesting, but not the main reason why we say the words apply to all of Scripture. The reason they do is that Scripture is an organic unity. Scripture, with all its different parts, is basically one organism, one entity. It is the one entity of the revelation of God to His church. And what underscores the fact that all of Scripture — even though made up of different books, even though written by different human instruments — is really one organic whole is that all of Scripture speaks of the salvation God has prepared for us in Jesus Christ. From the moment the promise was given to Adam and Eve (the promise of a seed who would save them) till the time Christ came, and then also in the New Testament (in the writings of the apostles), this is the one theme that prevails throughout: the salvation God has prepared for us in Christ.

Historically, the book of Revelation was the last development of that theme. The book was written much later than any of the other New Testament books. It was the last book written. But the point is that this is all that the church needed to know about the salvation Christ would come to bring. Added to the book of Revelation, all the prophets of the Old Testament, the epistles of the New Testament, the gospels, the history — all of that, but nothing more — is the revelation of God to us in Jesus Christ. Do we mean that we now fully comprehend God, that God has exhaustively revealed Himself? No, but everything we need to know about salvation has been given in Scripture and finished with the giving of the book of Revelation.

The proof that the book of Revelation must be the end of the revelation of God is that it was written by the last living apostle, and it was the last of his books that we know of and have determined to be canonical. The Scriptures were written by the apostles and prophets. The prophets are dead; the apostles are dead except John. And now, in his old age, he writes this book.

The text that we have before us contains a prohibition against, in the first place, adding to, and in the second place, taking from the words of the prophecy of Scripture, including the book of Revelation — a twofold prohibition. We may not add to, first of all. No man may say, “God has given me a new revelation. In order to be saved, you have to hear what I say, because Scripture won’t tell you enough.” Or, no man may say, “Before I came along, the church thought she understood Scripture, but she never had the true and complete meaning.” That may not be done. No man may add to this revelation.

And yet, we know that such has happened throughout the New Testament history. Men have arisen, especially with regard to doctrines of the last times and the coming of Jesus Christ, and have said, “I have found the way to predict the moment of Christ’s coming. I have found the way to understand all of Scripture.” Men have said, “Here is a new doctrine that the church must believe: Mary was sinless and perpetually a virgin.” No man may say, “The Spirit has given me new insights that the church has never had.” These ideas, though prevalent, are wrong. And it is Jesus Christ who shows clearly that they are wrong. “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.”

The reason why no man may add to these things is that Scripture is sufficient. Nothing more is necessary for faith and for life. You say, “Then what of the saints who were alive before Scripture was completed? Did they not have enough of the revelation?” The answer is: They did have enough. They had that central teaching of Scripture yet: salvation in Jesus Christ alone. To illustrate that, Paul, writing to the Galatians in chapter 1, rebukes them for having begun to listen to other men who teach a doctrine contrary to the doctrines that Paul preached. He says to the Galatians, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (vv. 6-8). Paul’s point is, the gospel is sufficient.

Why is Scripture sufficient? Because Scripture sets forth the gospel of God. That is the faith of the church of Jesus Christ, and it is the teaching of Jesus Christ Himself in our text: No man may add. The gospel is sufficient — and the gospel has been fully revealed in Scripture.

The second part of the prohibition is taking from the words of this book of prophecy. No man may say, “God has told me that certain parts of this book or that book or of Scripture are not important or are not true.” Yet how often that happens today. So soon as we buy into the idea that Scripture is really the word of man, we can throw parts out. Then we have “taken away from the words of the book of this prophecy.” So soon as we decide that we can revise the Scripture and write a Scripture that applies only to teens or a Scripture that applies only to women, we either have, or at least have come very close to, taking away from the words of the book of this prophecy. So soon as we say, “There are parts of Scripture that no longer apply to the church today — the Old Testament does not, or parts of the prophecies regarding the coming of Christ do not apply because they were already fulfilled” — then we have “taken away from the words of the book of this prophecy”.

The warning is timely! Many people today will condone the sins in which they live by saying, “But *that* Scripture doesn’t apply.”

Why may not anyone take away from the words of this book? The reason for that part of the prohibition is that Scripture is verbally inspired, that is, it is word-for-word the Word of God. God saw to it that the exact words that He wanted the church of Jesus Christ to understand were written by holy men who were moved by the Holy Spirit. **To subtract from the words of Scripture or the doctrines of Scripture is to deny that Scripture is word-for-word the Word of God**. It is to call God a liar. It is to deny that God knows best what we must know for faith and salvation. Therefore, Christ forbids any to do that.

Notice how severe a judgment Christ pronounces on those who do what the text prohibits. “If any man shall add unto these things, *God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:* And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, *God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”* A severe judgment!

The plagues that are written in the book are dreadful plagues. They are plagues that come upon those whom God hates, on whom He sends His wrath. They are not plagues that will come upon the people of God for whom Christ died, for He bore all our plagues by His death on the cross. But they are plagues that are reserved for the wicked.

One’s part in the book of life and one’s part in the holy city refer also to the salvation that God promises in this book. But when God says, “God shall take away his part out of the book of life and out of the holy city,” we must understand how severe the judgment is. It is the judgment of eternal death. Such a one who takes away from the words of this book will not be brought to heaven.

Now, notice that God says that He shall “*take away* his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city.” Some would say, on the basis of that wording, “Look, that means that some are saved for a time and then, at one point in time, they commit a sin on the basis of which God says to them, ‘You are no longer saved. While I had thought you would come to heaven and I intended to take you there, now you must go to hell.’” Let us not understand the text that way. Though it is true that the book of life is the book of those whose names from all eternity were chosen to salvation in Christ; though it is true that the holy city is the new Jerusalem, the heavenly church perfected at the time of the coming of Christ; and, therefore, to be in the book of life and to be in the holy city is to be saved and to enjoy salvation; when God says that He will take away his part, He does not mean that such a one enjoyed salvation for a time but will enjoy it no longer. Rather, He is speaking of one who, from our human viewpoint and from outward appearances, appeared to be a child of God. This is a member of the church on earth who takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy. This is, perhaps, the minister in your pulpit who no longer preaches the truth and yet, being in the church and a minister, it appears that he surely will be in heaven. This is, perhaps, the Sunday School teacher or the teacher in the Christian day school, confessing to be a child of God and a Christian, who nevertheless teaches what is contrary to the Word of God. Appearing outwardly to be a child of God because such a one is a member of the church on earth and because such a one makes an outward confession to believe Scripture, nevertheless, such a one will not be allowed entrance into the kingdom of God. Though it appears that they will be saved, God will take away the part that they appear to have. And, in doing that, He will make manifest that all along He had ordained such a one to everlasting destruction.

That they are worthy of that destruction and that this judgment, though severe, is just is also underscored in the text. First of all, it is underscored by the wording of the text, which shows that the punishment fits the crime. “If any man shall *add* unto these things, God shall *add* unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall *take away* from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall *take away* his part out of the book of life.” The punishment fits the crime.

But what also shows that this punishment is just is the fact that to tamper with the word of God is to show hatred of God Himself. We might not always think that of a person who teaches us false doctrine. We might think that he does so in all sincerity. But God speaks here as one who knows the motives and the hearts. And He says, “Tamper with My word? You show you hate Me. And I will visit your just punishment upon you.”

Do not think, dear radio listeners, that this will not certainly come to pass. For, in speaking this judgment, Jesus testifies of the certainty: “I testify,” He says. He bears witness. And He bears witness to that which God has told Him. It is Jesus, who knows the counsel of God, who knows whose names are written in the book of life, who died for the salvation of the chosen children of God, who knows who are saved and who are not. And knowing that, Jesus says, “I testify — this is what God *shall* do.” Therefore, dear radio listeners, take this warning to heart.

For whom is the warning intended? It is not only for the teachers and the preachers. Certainly these must obey it, and their judgment will be all the greater if they do what Christ forbids here, for by their teaching others false doctrines, they lead others astray. But Jesus testifies not just to those in important positions in the church. He says, “I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book.” Every person must take this warning to heart.

As we do so, we must confess upfront that we have sinned in the way that Christ prohibits here. We have sometimes had ideas that go beyond Scripture. We have, perhaps, at one time in our life thought that a part of Scripture did not apply to us. And if we acknowledge that sin and repent of it, then the punishment that God speaks of here will come upon (and did come upon) Christ for you and for me, so that we ought to repent of our sin and find forgiveness in Christ. But doing that, we must take the warning to heart. Any man who wilfully, without repenting, adds to the words of this book or takes from the words of this book will surely enjoy the severe judgment of God.

Understanding that, what can we do but pray.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, keep us from doing what is here forbidden. By Thy grace, keep us faithful to Thee. Cause us to bow before Thy word. Take from us the curses that we deserve and add to us the blessings that Christ earned, that at His coming we be found ready, faithful, and waiting. For Christ’s sake, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

**"Scripture: Its Infallibility"**

Rev. Doug Kuiper

*August 31, 2003; No. 3165*

Dear radio friends,

The child of God must know the Scriptures to be infallible. They are not only inerrant; that is true too. Inerrant means there is no error in them. But the Scriptures are also infallible: not capable of having error in them. That they are infallible explains why they are inerrant. There is no error, not merely as a coincidence, but because Scripture is unable to have errors in it.

The reason why Scripture cannot have errors in it is because it is the word of God, and God cannot lie. It is impossible for God to lie (Heb. 6:18), which God who cannot lie promised (Tit. 1:2). God is not a man, that He should lie (Num. 23:19). Because God is a God of light and of truth and of unchanging truth, so in Scripture there are no lies, errors, or deceptions.

That the Scriptures are infallible, however, does not merely follow from the truth that God does not change, but is also expressly stated in Scripture itself. There are a number of passages that imply or teach it to some degree, but the classic text regarding the infallibility of Scripture is John 10:35. There we read (and it is Jesus who is speaking): “[T]he scripture cannot be broken.”

Now, this is a parenthetical statement of Jesus. It is mentioned in connection with an argument that He is making to the Jews. Therefore, we must study it in connection with the whole incident and the whole argument. But there is a benefit in doing that. For in the context and in light of the argument, Jesus not only *says* that the Scripture cannot be broken (though clearly He does that), but He also applies and illustrates the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture.

Let us examine the words of Jesus, “[T]he scripture cannot be broken.”

The occasion for this assertion was that the Jews were ready to stone Jesus, charging Him with blasphemy. “Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him,” we read in John 10:31. And in verse 32, Jesus answered them, “Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?” The Jews answered Him, saying, “For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God” (v. 33).

In trying to stone Jesus, the Jews pretended to be zealous for the glory of the name of God, for blasphemy is, indeed, a heinous sin against God. It is speaking against God or His power or His majesty. It is attributing to God something evil or denying that He is good. It is a very terrible sin, and one that you and I must be on our guard against — that if we ever deny essential truths about God, deny that His word is true, deny His goodness and His grace — this, and many other things, would constitute blasphemy.

In the Old Testament, God prescribed stoning as punishment for blasphemy. Stoning was a sign of the curse of God — just as Christ’s death on the cross was an accursed death. The whole congregation was to participate in that stoning to show their hatred of the sin of blasphemy and their love for the Lord. Therefore, the Jews pretended to have a zeal for the law of God by obeying it in this instance. Yet, in doing so, they showed their blind hatred of Jesus as the Christ.

What showed their hatred was, first of all, the fact that the manner in which they intended to stone Him was illegal in that day. Rome now governed Judea, and Rome said the Jews could not put a man to death without the permission of Rome. There had been, however, no trial by Rome. The Jews had taken matters into their own hands, and they were going to stone Jesus.

What also showed their hatred was that this was a repeated attempt. They had tried to stone Him previously. At that time He had escaped from them. His time was not yet. But now, having found Him again and not believing His words, they were ready once more to stone Him who had not sinned. Their justification was that He was a blasphemer, for He claimed to be God.

But He *was* God. And He had demonstrated so many times that He was God. “Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?” In changing water into wine, in healing the sick, in feeding the multitudes, in forgiving sinners — in all these things Christ showed He was the Son of God, for He could do things no mere man could do. But they were blind. They hated Him, and they were going to stone Him.

In response to their attempt to stone Him, Jesus defended Himself. Now, being God as to His person, He did not have to defend Himself. He could have escaped. Or He could have caused them to fall down backwards powerless. But He did defend Himself in order to expose the hardness of their hearts and leave them without excuse. And His defense was clear. He reminded them then of the works that He had done and how they proved He was the Messiah (“If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him,” vv. 37, 38). Would it not be strange that a man who casts out devils is not God? Believe that He is God — only God has power over devils. That was part of Jesus’ defense — the works He had done showed He was the Messiah.

The second part of Jesus’ defense was His appeal to the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?” (vv. 34-36). Jesus quotes Psalm 82:6. That psalm is speaking of earthly judges and of God judging earthly judges. We read in verse 1: “God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods,” and then in verses 6 and 7: “I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.” In this psalm, God, by the inspired psalmist, is telling the earthly judges that, although they are gods (not in the sense of being divine in their nature or essence, but in the sense that to them has been entrusted the divine prerogative of judgment), yet they are merely men, will die like men, and will, one day, have to answer to *the* Judge of the judges, God Himself. Psalm 82, therefore, reminds all earthly judges to judge righteously.

But now Jesus appeals to that psalm in which God called men - mere mortal, sinful humans - gods because of the divine prerogative that had been entrusted to them, that of earthly judgment. “If God called men gods, then why do you hate Me, you Jews, when I have done no sin, but only good, and thereby have testified that I am truly God?” asks Jesus. It is in that connection that He says, “[A]nd the scripture cannot be broken.” There is the clinching of the argument — the infallibility of Scripture.

When Jesus says in John 10:35, “[A]nd the scripture cannot be broken,” He does not mean only that Psalm 82 cannot be broken — that we must take Psalm 82 for what it says — but He has in mind all of Scripture. Scripture cannot be broken and, therefore, no part of Scripture can be broken. To break Scripture is to deprive it of its authority. **Scripture cannot be broken because its authority is given from God.** No man can take that authority away. It is true that men *act* as though Scripture has no authority, that they disregard it and break its laws. But that does not mean the authority of Scripture has been truly broken. Just as when a child rebels against his parents and *acts* as though his parents have no authority, the parents still do have authority and the child will be judged for his refusing to acknowledge it.

The reason why the authority of Scripture is not broken is that it cannot be broken. You must understand that in our text the word “cannot” means “is not able to be.” So the reason why Scripture has no error is that it is not able to be broken. It is authoritative. Its words stand.

Now, in our day and age, many people do not agree with this word of Jesus, and they consider Scripture to be fallible, that is, to contain errors. Some say, “All of Scripture is fallible; none of it is trustworthy.” Others say, “Parts of Scripture are fallible. Those parts that teach us about salvation in Jesus Christ have no errors, but many other parts of Scripture not closely connected to the teaching of salvation in Christ are erroneous.” For example, men might point out that in parallel passages of Scripture there are discrepancies. We have four gospel accounts. They do not in every respect seem to agree in all the details of the history, even when they treat the same historical event. The books of Samuel and Kings have a parallel account in the books of Chronicles. There, too, some allege, are discrepancies. Another sort of error that some say is found in Scripture is that the New Testament writers quote the Old Testament writers in free style. Sometimes they get the quote “wrong”; sometimes they even seem to ascribe it to the wrong source. Matthew, in one instance, seems to quote Zechariah, but says he quotes Jeremiah (Matt. 27:9-10 where he says “Jeremy the prophet” but the quote seems to come from Zech. 11). A third instance of errors in Scripture, some would say, are those in which the teachings of Scripture contradict findings of science and history. The Bible, they say, speaks of a flat earth in having four corners (Rev. 7:1); science tells us it is a sphere. The Bible speaks of a six 24-hour day creation; science indicates the world evolved. These are examples of some ways in which people say the Scriptures have errors in them.

What lies behind one’s thinking that there are errors in Scripture? Really, the answer must be that they view Scripture as not being the word of God alone, but the word of man. And men make mistakes. Men write out of their own culture. Men’s writings reflect their own limitations. God is not the author, but men. We have already shown from Scripture, however, that God is the author of Scripture. And God cannot lie.

Others, perhaps, are prone to say that Scripture has errors because they desire to appear as learned men before the world. They would find themselves embarrassed by the so-called errors of Scripture and so, rather than trying to hold to these so-called errors as being factual truth, they call them errors to try to earn the respect of the world.

To all of this, the response of the child of God is these words of Jesus: “and the scripture cannot be broken.”

**Because Jesus said it, we are going to assert it, and we are going to do so as a matter of faith**. Scripture is the word of God. We know our God, we love our God, and we know He cannot lie; therefore we say, “Scripture cannot be broken.” Should it be that we cannot finally reconcile these supposed discrepancies found in Scripture, or should it be that we cannot fully explain Scripture when it appears to contradict itself or when it appears to contradict the findings of science, we are not going to say that because we cannot *explain* these differences, therefore Scripture has error. But instead, our starting point is to say, though we cannot explain it, Scripture is right. There is no error in Scripture.

At the same time, we must understand that many of these so-called errors can be understood rightly when Scripture is understood rightly. Scripture interprets Scripture. When a New Testament writer seems to quote an Old Testament writer but not accurately, we must understand that God, by inspiration, is causing that New Testament writer to shed some light on the Old Testament prophecy or passage that the Old Testament writer himself did not have. And the church of Christ, in order to understand the Old Testament better, is given the New Testament, and quotes of the Old Testament are written in the New Testament. Remember that, if you think that the New Testament writers err in quoting the Old Testament.

Scripture is not always to be interpreted literally. In that way also we can resolve some of the supposed discrepancies of Scripture. That there are four corners of the earth is a poetic device. There is some element of truth in that. But the expression that the earth has four corners is not intended to be scientific. However, when in Genesis 1 we read that the world was created in six days limited by morning and evening and, therefore, days of twenty-four hours, we must not say, “Scripture is being figurative here.” But we can say rather that God has created the world in such a wonderful way that He has to tell us just how it is lest we be deceived by the findings of science. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God (Heb. 11:3).

Now I have only given general ways in which some of the supposed errors fall away. We cannot go into them in detail. We cannot explain every one of them. **But the child of God takes as a starting point, in faith, the words of Christ and accepts them at their face value, “the scripture cannot be broken.”**

Now Christ’s use of the doctrine applies it and illustrates it. For He refers to the Old Testament. “Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?” Someone will say immediately, “Look, Jesus says He quotes from the law, but in fact He quotes from the psalms.” We must understand that the word “law” is used to refer to the whole Old Testament. Jesus speaks of “the law and the prophets.” Jesus is not intending to say here that this statement is taken from the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, or Deuteronomy. But the point is that in the Old Testament Scriptures the statement is found.

Furthermore, Christ’s use of the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture illustrates it because His quote makes clearer that which we find in the Old Testament. The quote as we find it in Psalm 82:6 says, “I have said, Ye are gods.” Who is the “I” who said this? The psalmist, perhaps. Maybe that is the answer, for back in verse 1 we read, “[H]e judgeth among the gods.” Is it the psalmist then who, by inspiration, is telling the Jews, “I said earlier you are gods. I am going to explain here what I mean”? No. Jesus makes clear in His quote of that text that the “I” is God Himself. “Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If He called them gods, unto whom the word of God came….” He called them gods. That is, Jesus is making clear here that it is Jehovah God who is the “I” of Psalm 82:6. Therefore, in two different ways we see that Christ’s use of the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture also illustrates it.

This is the ground, now, that Jesus uses to prove that He has the right to claim to be the Son of God. His works demonstrate it, and Scripture permits it. Let not the Jews accuse Him of blasphemy.

This argument we must take to heart, first of all, by taking at face value that which Scripture teaches. When it teaches that He is the Messiah, we must believe it. Then, when it teaches that the Scriptures cannot be broken, we must believe it. If the Scriptures could be broken, they could not be our guide, our trustworthy guide for all of life. If they cannot be broken, they *are* our guide and will always be able to be our guide. And you have, dear radio listeners, not my word, but the word of Jesus on it: The Scriptures cannot be broken. In them is no error. Bow before it and live.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we pray that if we might ever have thought that Scripture had errors in it, Thou wilt work faith in our hearts that it does not and cannot. Whether we understand how Scripture in every aspect speaks the truth or whether we still have questions about what Scripture means, nevertheless, cause us to believe that Thy word is truth, and to bow before it and in that way experience Thy blessing. For Jesus’ sake, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

**"Scripture: Its Perspicuity"**

Rev. Doug Kuiper

*September 7, 2003; No. 3166*

Dear radio friends,

Have you ever tried using a map when you were lost — and gave up all hope of getting to your destination because you could not figure out the map? Have you ever read an instruction booklet — and gave up all hope of putting the project together and completing it because you couldn’t understand the booklet? Have you ever read Scripture and thought, This isn’t clear; I don’t understand it; I don’t get it?

Perhaps there are parts of Scripture that we have said that about. Very likely, in fact — because of our limited ability to understand and because of the sin that remains in our hearts. Yet the word of God teaches us that it is clear. The fancy word is its *perspicuity.* It is clear. It is so clear that if anyone of us does not obey it or believe what it teaches, we cannot say, “I didn’t understand it”; but we must say, “I didn’t want to do it.”

That such is true of the word of God is taught in the passage we have before us today, Deuteronomy 30:11-14. Moses says there to the people of God, “For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.” Such is the word of Moses to the people of Israel.

In that text we see that the word of God is so clear that obedience and faith to that word is possible. Now, Moses is underscoring the ability to obey. He says, “For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off.” This word comes to Israel at a crucial juncture in her wilderness wanderings. She has almost completed those wanderings. Remember that for forty years she had to wander in the wilderness as judgment for her unbelief. Moses reminds her of that and then gives her the law of God for the second time. She had received it at Mount Sinai. Most of the people who were at Sinai have died. So Moses repeats the law to this new generation. Now, in the last couple of chapters, Moses is underscoring the need to obey that law. Why must the law be obeyed? Not because that will earn salvation. Israel is about to enter Canaan not at all because she has obeyed the law. In fact, she has many times disobeyed. But she must obey the law in order to enjoy fellowship with God and the experience of His blessing.

What was that law that must be obeyed? It was the commands that Moses set before her — the Ten Commandments as well as all of the laws regarding how Israel must live as the people of God. It is necessary, Moses’ general argument is, that you, Israel, obey this law.

While our text seems to speak only of obedience to the law, it also speaks, by implication, of faith in the gospel. Just as the church must obey the law, so the church must believe in the gospel. We see that it speaks by implication of the faith in the gospel, first of all, because the law and gospel are not two essentially different things. Some say that the law was the way in which people were saved in the Old Testament, and the gospel is the way in which we are saved in the New Testament, so that law and gospel are two different things. But in fact, both law and gospel are essential parts of the revelation of God. God’s revelation *is* gospel. The law *is* gospel. For Israel, the law, which spoke of Jesus Christ typified in the sacrifices and in the feasts that Israel must observe, was the gospel. The law, which taught her her sins because it commanded her to obey and love God and reminded her that she could not, pointed her to Jesus Christ and her need for Christ, who could alone obey the law and, therefore, save her. The law is the gospel.

The gospel is not that we can of ourselves keep the law and earn our place in heaven. But the gospel is that, though the law makes known our imperfections and inabilities, Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law and has given us grace to obey the law again.

Reason number one, then, that we say that the text also speaks of the need for faith is that the law and the gospel are one.

Reason number two, probably even more important, is that when Paul in the New Testament quotes our text he applies it not to the command of the law, but to faith. He does that in Romans 10:6-8: “But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach.” He quotes--not just merely alludes to, but quotes--part of the words of Moses with application to the gospel and faith in the gospel. So we must understand that faith in the gospel is absolutely necessary to salvation also. This is not because faith in the gospel is our work; not because it is a condition that *we* meet; but because the gospel is the only place in which the truth of the word of God regarding our salvation is set forth, and faith is the only means God uses to cause us to love and to know that gospel and enjoy its blessedness.

So, in a word, Moses is requiring the people to obey, and Paul (both Moses and Paul speaking by inspiration) requires faith.

Now, Moses anticipates excuses people might give why they did not obey and then excuses they might give why they did not believe. The fundamental excuse is that the word of God is too difficult to understand, by the common person anyway. If it is to be understood at all, it would take a special person to help us understand it. “Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?” There must be, according to this excuse that Moses anticipates, a special person to explain this law to us. Or, “Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?” There must be a special person to go over and get the law for us. Fundamentally, then, the excuse is: The word of God is too difficult for us; it takes a special person to understand it.

One might say that the Scriptures are too difficult because God’s speech is apparently too wonderful to understand. That is the first excuse Moses refers to. “It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?” The appeal here is to the infinite difference between God and man. God knows all things. Man, by nature, knows nothing. God is spirit; we are creatures. How then is man expected to understand the word of God? Now this excuse that Moses anticipates is really an attempt at piety. It would be using the truth about God, for God is spirit and God does know all; man is but a creature and does know nothing true of himself. But it is to take the truth about God and to use it in a way He does not approve of.

That, first of all, would be an excuse that some would use for not obeying or believing — we could not understand; we are just humans.

Another excuse is that someone says, “The word of God is too difficult because it was written in another language and to another people.” “Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?” Someone says, “After all, the Scriptures were given to a people far off in a different country and with a different language and with different customs. How can I, living in the year 2003 in the United States, understand a word written to the Hebrews millennia ago? It takes a special person, one with a better understanding of the culture in which it was originally written, to understand.”

Moses anticipates these excuses, how strikingly, before he speaks to the people of God. The people of God who have wandered in the wilderness and have been taught that God is angry with those who do not obey and believe — surely *they* want to know the law now. Surely they will obey it. Surely they desire to believe the gospel. Surely they are not going to look for reasons to avoid obeying and believing. Yet they do. And Moses anticipates it.

Saved men and women are still prone to sin. You and I, saved by the blood of Christ with the Holy Spirit sanctifying us, still have in us the old man of sin, still sometimes want to do what the law forbids and to believe what the gospel will not permit us to believe, and then to find an excuse.

Not only is it true of every one of us because of the sin that remains in us, but also it is true because the church of Jesus Christ as manifest on earth is made up of believers and unbelievers. Those unbelievers in the church do not always show themselves to be unbelievers at first. They appear to love the things that the church loves. But in due time they show that they are really unbelievers and not at all interested in obeying the law of God.

That is how it was for Israel so many times in the wilderness, and then, even when she went into the land of Canaan, it became clear that not all who were *of* Israel were truly Israel.

Moses, anticipating these excuses, shows also that he was governed by the Holy Spirit, for these excuses are used today and have been throughout history by those denying the clarity, the clearness, of Scripture. Some say, “Scripture is too wonderful for the average Joe to understand. But I have figured it out. Listen to me! I can go into heaven and bring it to you. I can go across the sea and understand it for you.” Some say, “Don’t read the word of God yourself. Just listen to the preacher or the priest. They understand better than you.” Some say, “You have to understand the numerical codes hidden in Scripture. Or you have to understand the hidden meanings of words in the original language truly to understand Scripture. Listen to me. I’ve cracked the code.” And others say, “Because Scripture was written in a different culture, I have immersed myself in that culture, and I have insights necessary to understand Scripture.” This is the idea behind the “new hermeneutics,” the new way of interpreting Scripture. Scripture itself is cultural and time-bound. We have to find a way to apply Scripture to our culture. But as we do so, there will be changes. It takes a scholar to be able to do that. These are the excuses that Moses anticipates and that we hear today.

But anticipating those excuses, Moses refutes them. You may not use those excuses, he says to Israel! The Holy Spirit recorded Moses’ words in scripture – the written, unchanging word of God which transcends all cultures – as God’s word to you and me today. You and I may not use *any* excuses for not believing or not obeying. The word of God is *not* hidden. It is *not* far off. It is *not* in heaven. It is *not* beyond the sea. But it is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart.

It could not be closer. The word of God is not close to us merely because it was written in human language, and we are humans, so we can understand. Oh, in that sense it is close. But **the child of God understands that the word of God is close to him because God has worked it in him and has given him the understanding of it by His Holy Spirit**.

There is, therefore, no excuse for not obeying or believing. God made His word as simple as possible. He spoke it originally to men who wrote it in the Greek and Hebrew languages, to be read and heard by people who spoke and understood the Greek and Hebrew languages. As one reformer said, “He spoke it as baby talk.” It was so clear, it was so down-to-earth. Baby talk — not that He mumbled. We heard it.

And then, do not think that God gave the word just to one people at one time in history. He gave it to His church. It is true that in the Old Testament His church was comprised of Jews in Israel. Then, in the New Testament, it was comprised also of Gentiles in Europe. But, above all, He gave His word to sinners. That is why the word of God transcends cultures. It is spoken to sinners in a language that sinners, who know and hate their sin, can understand. And this, dear radio listeners, is the doctrine of perspicuity or the clearness of Scripture. Scripture is able to be understood. You can read it and know what it means, what it requires of you, and that it builds you up in the faith.

When we say it is clear, we do *not* mean that we are able to comprehend it. To comprehend it means that we understand it fully, that we need not go back to it again because we have exhausted it. That no child of God will be able to do. Scripture is deep and profound. And every time the child of God reads it again, he says, “That’s new. Not that God gave a new revelation, but I understand it in a new way.”

That Scripture is clear and able to be understood does not mean that the child of God need not go to church and sit under the preaching of the gospel, that we can skip church because we all know what Scripture says. In fact, in Romans 10, the passage in which Paul quotes Deuteronomy, he is doing so to underscore that we preach this gospel, and that through preaching God works faith.

But it is clear. You can understand it.

What is the explanation for the clarity? It is the work of Jesus Christ in the hearts of His people by the Holy Spirit. In fact, then, there are some who will say, “I do not understand,” who will put Scripture down and say, “I just don’t get it.” The reason will be, they have not the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture bears that out — II Peter 3:16. Peter, by inspiration, addresses the church and speaks of the hard things in the epistles of Paul, “in which are some things hard to be understood.” Then he speaks of a certain kind of people who wrest them, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction. “Wrest,” that is, they twist them. But he indicates that those who twist the Scriptures, because they are hard to be understood, are unlearned and unstable. And he exhorts the church that they not do that. Those who are unlearned and unstable and who wrest the Scriptures have not the gift of the Spirit. Paul also shows this in Romans 10, where he quotes Deuteronomy 30.

Excuses for not believing are fundamentally a rejection that Jesus Christ is the Saviour. And if anyone says, “But I still do need one to go up into heaven and to bring the word down to me or to descend into the deep,” then, Paul says, We have that one in Jesus Christ! “[T]he righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach.” Jesus Christ, having been sent from heaven into our sinful flesh to reveal God to us, having been sent to the depth of the grave to redeem us from sin, now living in our hearts, makes clear to us what the word of God requires.

Do you say, “But it was written in a foreign language”? “But it’s too heavenly”? “But it’s written to a different culture”? Then you must ask yourself the question: “Is Jesus Christ alive in me?” Christ has made the Scriptures clear.

Are they for you? Oh, even for me, dear radio listeners, there are parts about which I say, “I don’t understand fully what this means.” And other parts about which I say, “I’m not sure if I even really have begun to understand what this says.” That does not deny the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture. Much of Scripture we understand. And, even in those passages we do not understand, this is clear to us: they do reveal the salvation God gives.

Does not even a child, after all, know what it means: “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want”? (Psalm 23:1)

Therefore, dear radio listeners, use the Scriptures as your guide. Study them, search them, work with them, learn from them, and enjoy the freedom that comes to those who believe and obey.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, keep us from ever making excuses for our disobedience or unbelief. We believe; help our unbelief. Work faith in our hearts more strongly, and cause us to glorify Thee in all that we do. For Jesus’ sake, Amen.