

No public speaker is ever perfect. When you get enough time behind the microphone—or on-screen—you are bound to say something amiss. George W. Bush was my favorite president in this regard. In fact, his verbal slip-ups have been called *Bushisms*. These were often accidental creations from verbal slip-ups, mispronunciations, stunt-words, and word-blending. Saturday Night Live had a lot of fun with this—back in the day.

He uttered one of my favorites during a campaign stop in 2000. He said, “I know how hard it is for you to put food on your family.” He said some painfully obvious things like, “I think we can agree, the past is over.” At other times, it seems that he was playing with us—like he knew what he was doing. In a speech from 2000 on environmental issues, he once said, “I know human beings and fish can coexist peacefully.”

But really—my point is this—sometimes he made up his own words—words that sounded viable—but were words you can’t find in the dictionary—misunderestimate, strategery, resignate. I’ll leave you to decide if he did it on purpose.

Paul has one of these in our reading from 2 Timothy today. It is a word you won’t find in any other place in the Bible. Now, this in itself is not unusual. Paul uses a rich and unique theological vocabulary. But, you also won’t find this word in any extra-biblical Greek literature before Paul. It’s not in the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It’s not in Josephus—the first century Jewish historian. Paul—when the need arises—is not above making up his own words.

The word that I am referencing is the one translated “breathed out by God.” It is just one word in Greek—although Paul crafted it by pushing two Greek words together—the word for *God*—and the word for *breath*. And, it is important to know that the word for *breath* and the word for *Spirit* are related in Greek.

And with this new Paulism, our Epistle reading today makes one of the strongest cases for our understanding of Scripture. This is such a big issue. When we see the Bible as *God-breathed*—as *Spirit-given*—it is because that is the claim Paul makes. The Scriptures are both grace and truth—and they are God’s own Word.

Our church has a rich tradition of taking God’s Word seriously. We battled over the authority of the Scriptures back in the 60s and 70s in the LCMS. And thankfully, we got this one right.

But even back in the 16th century, in *The Formula of Concord*, the Lutheran Reformers show us the centrality of God’s Word. They say, “We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and norm according to which all teachings, together with all teachers, should be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testament alone.”

Now, as Paul is writing to Timothy, most of the New Testament has been written. And Peter himself referred to Paul’s writings as Scripture. So, Paul’s reference is not just to the Old Testament. All the Scriptures—Old and New Testaments—are *God-breathed*.

The more common translation of this word is *inspired*. We confess the inspiration of Scripture. But this word has left us with some difficulties. Typically, when we talk about *inspiration*, it means something like *a source of creativity or of excitement*. We are

motivated and challenged by the inspiring. But that is not what Paul means here exactly—although I think when we understand the Scriptures, they will do that for us—but in the proper way.

Inspired means that they have a divine origin. The Bible is God’s book in a way that no other book is. And it takes on the nature of its Creator. And that means it has unique authority over us. Since it is God-breathed—it has no errors—it has authority—it is what God intends it to be.

But I think this—sometimes—is why we keep it at a distance. God’s Word makes us nervous. It says things that make us uncomfortable. And so, we don’t read it. We don’t give our hearts and minds over to it. We don’t give the Scriptures that everyday access to our lives and our thinking. And it is because it makes us nervous.

Maybe you have heard me use this quote before, but it confronts us in useful and productive ways. Soren Kierkegaard once said, “The matter is quite simple. The Bible is very easy to understand. But we Christians...pretend to be unable to understand it because we know very well that the minute we understand, we are obliged to act accordingly. Take any words in the New Testament and forget everything except pledging yourself to act accordingly. My God, you will say, if I do that my whole life will be ruined.”

Kierkegaard is right. The Word has authority. We are called to obey. And obedience is good, but it is not going to be easy. It will involve a death to self. It is a narrow way. And yet, He calls us to a glorious path. His word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. And let me call you to really open yourself up to this idea—the authority of God’s Word over our lives.

And when we give ourselves over to the Scriptures—they start doing their job. And that task is two-fold. They lead people to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. And they train God’s people for every good work.

I hope I have been not talking about our recent vacation too much. Our first real archaeological site was in Ephesus. And one of the first surprises for me was that you could go almost anywhere—and touch almost anything. There were very few ropes—and most of them were there to keep people safe. Ancient ruins, inscriptions, columns, streets—it was all right there ready to be encountered.

I really want you to think of your encounter with the Bible in these terms. It isn’t a book that should be left for the Pastor. It isn’t a coffee table book recording baptisms and funerals. It is for you to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest—as we so often pray.

Admittedly, some things in the Bible are hard. Predestination and election will always keep our heads spinning. But let’s focus on the main things and the plain things. You don’t necessarily need to get fixated on how to find Thessalonica on a map. I am okay with a little confusion over the number of generations between Adam and Noah.

But to understand the Gospel—and the life of Discipleship—these things really matter. And these we need to hear these two topics again and again—until they become our own—and until they work their way into our hearts.

The Scriptures do what Paul says right in our text to Timothy. They “are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” And then, they are “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

And if we claim that the Bible is the sole source and norm for our truth about Jesus Christ and the faith, then that means that other sources are not of the same value. The newest self-help book. The values of my political party. My ideas—which are really not my own—I just found them on Facebook—or on the evening news. These are not the Word of God—even if they ring true to me.

Paul warns us about having itching ears. And this means something like becoming entangled in the Spirit of the age. It means that if we are uncomfortable with what the Bible says—we side with ourselves—over God’s own voice. I think this often happens in our day with issues of morality and marriage and sexuality.

All we have to do is read something like 1 Corinthians 6. “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

This is hard. But it is clear. The words make sense to us—even if we may not like to admit it. So, we can shut our ears—and pretend that Paul didn’t just say that. Or we can say that he is wrong. We can step out of two millennia of the church’s consistent teaching on these moral issues—and find spiritual teachers who will say what we want to hear. But that is exactly what Paul is warning us against in our reading. And really, this desire to have our ears tickled—to hear only what we want to hear—is unbelief.

Lutheran Pastor Bo Giertz once said, “Here we see the essential nature of disbelief: It wants to prevail over God. It doesn’t necessarily have to deny God’s existence, but recognition of God’s existence is not the same as believing. Faith is essentially the heart’s true relationship to God. Love, reverence, obedience, and child-like trust are part of faith. Self-centeredness and conceit are a part of disbelief... You can’t escape taking a stand indefinitely. An encounter with Jesus has consequences.”

So, in faith, let’s let God’s Word “reprove, rebuke, and exhort” us. Let’s say that Paul is right. That God the Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures is right. And if anyone is wrong—it’s me—it’s our culture—it’s the spirit of the age. And so, we let God’s Word correct us. We remember that Jesus came for sinners—even for the kind of sinners that we find on Paul’s list. And then we let God tell us the kind of life that He wants every single one of us to live.

And I guess the question is, are you willing to be corrected? Are you willing to embrace the clear teachings of the Scripture—even if they make you uncomfortable—or if they are currently out of style? Will you stand with Jesus—even if you have to stand alone?

This is the nature of faith—it is loyalty to Jesus Christ—above all else. And it is to follow the inspired—the God-breathed—Word of God.

And when we give ourselves over to the Scriptures—they start doing their job. They lead people to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. And they train God’s people for every good work. They point us to God’s grace. And they send us to live as He has designed.

There is this famous story from the life of Augustine. And this was his conversion moment. This was when he really became a follower of Christ. He was at home with his

mother and he heard children playing nearby. One of them was singing—for whatever reason—these words, “Take and read.”

Augustine’s mother Monica was already a Christian. She had a copy of Romans sitting on the table. And so, rather thoughtlessly, Augustine took up Romans and read the first chapter. And it was so eye-opening for him, that from that time on, he started reading the Scriptures—and he took them very seriously. And because he took them seriously, he started following Christ.

This is the way God’s Word works. It is God-breathed. It is inspired. It is performative. It does what it says. God achieves His purposes. And this is God’s will for you. Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture. Take and read. His Word always does what God intends.

Maybe Isaiah says this the best. And I will leave things right here today. “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” In the name of Jesus. Amen.

+Soli Deo Gloria+