**MALE AND FEMALE HE CREATED THEM**

**PART I**

**GOD’S WORD IS THE FINAL WORD**

**2 Timothy 3:14-17**

**INTRODUCTION**

Today we begin a new sermon series on gender and sexuality that I am calling “Male and Female He Created Them”, a phrase taken from Genesis 1:27. Last Sunday we heard Paul Carter preach from Acts 20, which is one of the most important chapters in the Bible that define a pastor’s role. This is where I receive my marching orders. And as we heard last Sunday, Acts 20:27 says that I must preach “the whole counsel of God”. I agree with Paul Carter that the best way to do this is to preach through an entire book of the Bible. It’s the only way that a church is ever going to hear “the whole counsel of God” and not just a preacher’s favourite subjects.

But this series will be an exception. It won’t be a journey through an entire book. They will still be expository sermons, but our texts will be taken from different books of the Bible. I feel compelled to undertake this series for two main reasons, which I also take from Acts 20. The first reason is that Acts 20:20 says that “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable”. There aren’t many more topics as easy to shrink from as gender and sexuality, and yet the Bible says a great deal about both. And we know that if the Bible says something about it, it’s important. It’s important enough that God had it inscripturated for all time, for our good and for his glory.

So why isn’t more being taught about gender and sexuality? Many of you have heard of Dr. Jordan Peterson, a psychology professor at the University of Toronto, who, contrary to university policy, refuses to refer to any of his students with genderless pronouns. His stand on this issue has attracted international attention as people all over the world wonder why he doesn’t just give up. He illustrates this pressure to just give up in an e-mail from an anonymous American colleague of his who agrees with his position. This colleague gives voice to how many feel about raising this topic when he writes, “The personal consequences of objecting are huge. The effect of my objection on society is miniscule. The risk isn’t worth it.”

I am sure that many pastors would say the same thing. “The risk isn’t worth it.” It’s easy to wonder, “What if we lose a whole bunch of members? Losing members means losing revenue. What if we can’t afford our building anymore? Surely it’s better to just avoid the issue so that the church doesn’t have to close its doors.” This kind of logic has some plausibility to it. It says that a silent church is better than no church. But is that true? Is it better to be silent for the sake of continued existence? The tragic irony of this kind of thinking is that silence isn’t what saves churches. It’s what kills churches. That’s precisely what we’ve seen in the mainstream denominations as they’ve gone liberal. For me to be faithful to God’s calling on me as a pastor, and for us as a church to be faithful to God’s calling on us as a community, we need to sit under the teaching of all the Scriptures, including that which is evil to shrink from declaring. This series will help me to do this on a topic that is too easily ignored.

The second reason is taken from verse 28, where I am instructed to “pay careful attention to all the flock” and to “care for the church of God”. I know that some of you have struggled with what the Bible teaches about gender and sexuality, and that many more of you have kept those struggles to yourself. My prayer and eager expectation is that this series will help me to care for you by showing you the beauty of the Bible’s teaching on this subject and to protect you from false teaching.

* I want to care for those of you who may struggle because you have gay or transgender friends whom you care about deeply, and you can’t reconcile what the Bible says about gender and sexuality with how happy they seem to be.
* I want to care for those of you who may struggle because you have felt the deep pull of the culture around us. You don’t want to be labelled a bigot or an ignorant fundamentalist or a backwards thinker. And so you slowly begin to believe that the culture must be right, and that the Bible must be wrong.
* And I want to care for those who find this struggle intensely personal. You’ve felt same-sex attraction, or you’ve questioned whether your biological sex is truly reflective of who you are. This series is for you. I want to care for you by showing you that what the Bible teaches about gender and sexuality is not only clear but beautiful. We don’t just want to believe the Bible out of dutiful obligation, like kids dragging their feet to obey their daddy’s direction. We want to believe the Bible because we see the beauty of the life that it holds out to us, not just eternal life, but life here and now, including the parts of our lives that touch on gender and sexuality.

With all that being said, I have decided to begin this series on the authority of the Bible. I can’t think of a topic that’s more important to how Christians are to respond to the growing movement of transgenderism and homosexuality than Scripture’s authority. This is because the Christian position on gender and sexuality stands or falls on the authority of the Scriptures. Think about it. Without the Scriptures, what reason do we have to say that people aren’t entitled to self-determine their gender identity? What reason do we have to say that marriage isn’t for gay couples? We will have no reason. But if we believe that the Bible is true, then nothing that the world says will convince us to believe otherwise.

Now turn with me to 2 Timothy 3:14-17. This is the text we will be using to learn from the Scriptures about the authority of the Scriptures. The context is that Paul has been writing to Timothy about the persecutions to come, specifically from people who are going from “bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived”, as we see in verse 13. Our context isn’t so different. We know that persecution will come for taking the stand that we do on gender and sexuality, and we know that we will be tempted to abandon the truths of the Bible in the face of that persecution. Like Timothy, we need something to hold on to prepare for the persecution to come and to protect us from going from “bad to worse”. What does Paul point us to? He points us to the Scriptures.

**Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17**

At the heart of this text is the lesson that **God’s Word is the Final Word**. We’re going to look at two things today: (1) The Meaning of the Bible’s Authority; and (2) Three Reasons to Trust the Bible’s Authority, which will have three sub-points: its credible history, its saving message, and its sanctifying power. So our outline today looks like this:

1. The Meaning of the Bible’s Authority
2. Three Reasons to Trust the Bible’s Authority:
   1. The Bible’s Credible History
   2. The Bible’s Saving Message
   3. The Bible’s Sanctifying Power

(1) **THE MEANING OF THE BIBLE’S AUTHORITY**

Look at verse 16: “All Scripture is breathed out by God”. There it is. This is the penultimate phrase in the Bible about its authority. Once we understand what this means, we really don’t need anything else to establish the Bible’s authority.

Some Bible translations, like the King James Version, use the phrase “All Scripture is inspired by God”. But if we were to translate the phrase literally, we would get “breathed out by God” rather than inspired.

This distinction is important, because in contemporary language we talk about being “inspired” all the time. We’re “inspired” by random acts of kindness by strangers, by the courage of a child with cancer, by the generosity of a person with almost no money. The word has taken on the meaning of seeing something that makes us want to do something, whether it be imitating that person, or for those who are more artistic, creating something that captures that moment of inspiration.

That’s not what Paul is talking about here. He’s not saying that the people who wrote the books of the Bible were “inspired” by God in the sense that they saw something in God that was beautiful and were driven to write down something that accurately captured their feelings. If that were the case, the Bible wouldn’t so much be God’s Word as it would be the personal diaries containing the words of men.

But verse 16 tells us that Scripture is God’s Word because it contains God’s own words. Scripture is “breathed out by God”. It finds its origin in him. Think about what this means. Words, left by themselves, are just tools for communication. They have no more utility than a bunch of woodworking tools that sit unused in a shed. But when words are taken up and used, something remarkable happens. They cease to be just words. They become a part of the person using them. We use the words that we speak out to express what we value, how we feel, what we want, what we love, what we hate. In short, when we use words, those words express who we are.

Our criminal justice system certainly understands this. If someone were to say, “I’m going to kill you”, that person could be criminally charged with uttering threats. The person could say, “well, those were just words. I didn’t actually do anything”, but I can tell you right now that that would be a pitiful defence. It wouldn’t work. And it’s because even secular society understands that the words we say are an expression of who we are, and therefore we can be punished for the words we use.

In the same way, God’s words are not just words. They are an expression of who God is. Therefore, we can say that they are eternal just as he is eternal. They are true just as he is true. They are good just as he is good. They are powerful just as he is powerful. And they are authoritative just as he is authoritative. This is what it means for Scripture to be “breathed out by God”.

It’s true that God used human beings to produce the Scriptures. The Bible didn’t drop down from heaven. Nor did God write these words by his own hand. Instead, he chose to use human beings as his instruments. But he used them in such a way that, despite their humanity and fallibility, they wrote down what is divine and infallible. B.B. Warfield, the great Princeton theologian on the doctrine of Scripture, said it this way:

“The biblical writers do not conceive of the Scriptures as a human product breathed into by the Divine Spirit, and thus heightened in its qualities or endowed with new qualities; but as a Divine product produced through the instrumentality of men.”

Now let’s think about the nature of authority. It is important to remember that, when we talk about authority, we’re talking about someone else having rights over us. If I’m an employee, my boss has the right to tell me what my job description is, what my wages are, what my vacation time will be. We need to see, however, that whenever we talk about earthly authority, we’re talking about limited authority. Your boss doesn’t have the right to tell you how to spend your off-work hours, or how you use your money, or what you believe about God. Earthly authority is always limited in relation to what it can tell us to do.

But God doesn’t have limited authority. He has ultimate authority. God has ultimate authority over our actions, our words, even our thoughts. God has authority to direct our work life, our family life, our leisure life, our thought life, our emotional life. And the reason why God has ultimate authority over every aspect of our lives is that he created us, not so that we could live for ourselves, but so that we could live for him.

And verse 16 tells us that God has told us what he wants us to do and to believe in Scripture. The Scriptures were “breathed out by God”. They carry God’s authority with them. In fact, we can say with confidence that when the Bible speaks, God speaks. God’s word is the final word. When we obey the Bible, we obey God. When we believe the Bible, we believe God. But when we disobey the Bible, we disobey God. And when we disbelieve the Bible, we disbelieve God.

This applies to all the pages of the Bible, from its teaching about salvation to its teaching about sexuality. I recognize that many of us will find the Bible’s teaching on gender and sexuality difficult. We’ve been so shaped by our culture to believe tolerance and inclusivity are the ultimate virtues to live by. When we struggle with what the world tells us, we need to remember not only what we believe, but who we believe. We believe the Bible because we believe God.

(2) **THREE REASONS TO TRUST THE BIBLE’S AUTHORITY**

This leads to our second point: three reasons to trust the Bible’s authority. Some of you may be expecting some sort of apologetics presentation right now where I talk about the integrity of the Bible’s source documents or the historical accuracy of its factual records. That’s one way someone could go about increasing one’s confidence in the Bible’s authority. But that’s not what I’m going to do. Apologetics have their place, but ultimately they will never, by themselves, convince anyone that the Bible carries the authority of God. Apologetics deal with probabilities, not certainties. We need certainty, and certainty only comes from the Holy Spirit taking the words of the Bible and sealing them in our hearts, so that we are convinced that they are true. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:12.

“Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.”

Some of you may still be disappointed, because you have seen that I have a circular argument here. I am trying to convince you that the Bible is authoritative by appealing to Scripture itself. So let me add this: every position on gender and sexuality depends on first principles that are impossible to defend. Those who would use philosophy and reason would have to justify why reason should determine their position. They can’t do that without using reason. Reason is their first principle. Others would use their experience to justify why they believe that transgenderism is good and natural. They’ve seen that it makes people happy. But when pressed on why experience should determine what is good and natural, they have no choice but to continue appealing to those emotions themselves. Everyone has a first principle that they are appealing to. Some trust in reason, others in emotions. We trust in the Bible. It is our first principle. By appealing to the Bible for the Bible’s authority, we’re not doing anything that others aren’t doing too.

So let me give you the three reasons to believe the authority of the Bible found in our text.

(a) **THE BIBLE’S CREDIBLE HISTORY**

The first is the Bible’s credible history, meaning not the history of how it came together, but the history of how you came to hear it. We see that in verse 14: “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it”. The first reason that Paul gives to Timothy to continue trusting the Bible, and that he gives to us, is that the people we received the message of the Bible from were trustworthy, loving people.

Think about who your spiritual mentors are. They may be your parents. They may be your pastors. They could be your siblings, your friends, even your children. Whoever it may have been, I think we can all agree that a big reason why we first trusted the Bible is that we trusted those who brought it to us.

In 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul shows us that this was Timothy’s experience as well: “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.” So when Paul says in verse 14, “continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it”, he’s saying “remember the godliness of your mother and grandmother, how much they loved you, how much they cared for others, how they walked with God. And remember that they trusted the Scriptures.”

I’ll never forget hearing John Piper on a conference panel speaking about the authority of the Scriptures. John Piper, a brilliant thinker, with a PhD from a liberal university in Germany, was asked about why he believed the Bible. His answer? “Because my momma told me it’s true.”

Similarly, Kevin DeYoung writes about his experience in his very helpful book about the Bible, *Taking God At His Word*:

I went to a middle-of-the-road Christian college where the religion professors were often liberal. I saw many of my classmates have their faith deconstructed and never built up again in a healthy way. When people ask me why I didn’t go down the same path, the best answer I have—besides noting the grace of God—is that I trusted my parents and my upbringing more than my professors. I had doubts as a college student. There were new questions I didn’t know how to answer. But what kept me anchored was confidence in what I had learned as a child and in those from whom I had learned it.” (p. 114)

There is nothing wrong with believing the Bible is God’s word because you trust those who brought it to you. It’s not the only reason, but it’s an important one. And so when you’re tempted to abandon what the Bible teaches about gender and sexuality in favour of what the world teaches, remember who brought you the Bible in the first place. The world doesn’t love you like your parents love you, or your Christian friends, or your spiritual mentors. The world cares more about its ideas. They care about your souls. So continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it.

(b) **THE BIBLE’S SAVING MESSAGE**

The second reason is found in verse 15, “how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” Paul is saying continue with the Scriptures, because it is in the Scriptures that you found the gospel.

There is nothing more precious in the world than the good news that Jesus Christ has died for sinners, that we might be forgiven by God and reconciled to God. This is why we are Christians. Everyone here who is a Christian is a Christian because of the power, the comfort, the love, the joy, and the peace that we have found in the gospel. The world doesn’t have anything close to the gospel. It may teach acceptance, but only if you do the right things. It may offer worldly wealth and success, but it cannot satisfy our deepest desires. It may promise to help you change, but it has no power to free us from the slavery of sin. The gospel does what the world cannot. But the most precious part of the gospel is not what it does for us, but who it brings us to. It brings us to God. It unites us to God through Christ in the Spirit, so that we can know him and enjoy him forever. Through the cross, we are brought back to the lover of our souls, the creator of all things, our heavenly father. And all this offered to us freely, through faith. We don’t have to earn it. We don’t have to work for it. We just have to receive it by faith.

This is the Bible’s message. The words of the gospel were spoken to us through the word of God. It made us “wise” for salvation, giving us entire categories of thought – like sin, redemption, atonement, freedom – that prepared our hearts to believe, and to accept the message of the gospel with joy. This is what’s at stake when we talk about gender and sexuality.

Some may say “I can keep believing what the Bible says about salvation and not what it says about gender and sexuality”, but God cannot be partially trusted. His word is not a garage sale where we pick what we want and throw away the rest. The Scriptures are the ultimate authority in all of life without exception. But when we pick and choose what to hold onto and what to throw away, we’re deciding not to trust God. We’re saying “I trust that you saved me, but I don’t trust that you got gender and sexuality right.” That kind of trust is no trust at all. Trust believes that another knows better. But when we pick and choose, we’re saying that we know better. We’re submitting the Bible to our beliefs rather than submitting our beliefs to the Bible. We are putting ourselves over the Bible when the Bible is meant to be over us. And if we compromise the ultimate authority of the Scriptures, then we compromise the gospel.

This is what’s at stake here. If the Bible is God’s word – that is, an expression of who he is – and we don’t trust its teaching on gender and sexuality, how can we say that we trust him? How can we truly say that we believe the gospel? Our response to the gospel must be one of trusting God, but we don’t do that when we distrust his word.

(c) **THE BIBLE’S SANCTIFYING POWER**

The third reason is found in verses 16-17: all Scripture is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” Paul is saying that we should continue with the Scriptures because it is in the Scriptures that we receive the power to do good: it frees us from doing what is wrong, and it frees us to do what is right. We become equipped “for every good work”.

The Bible equips us for “every good work” in two ways. The first way is that it shows us what is good to do. It establishes the standard of morality that we are to live by. It does this through both commands and the examples of godly believers in the Bible. But the second way is more important. The Bible also empowers us what is good to do. If the Bible only showed us what is good to do, then we would all be hopeless, because none of us could meet the Bible’s standards for right living. But the Bible does much more than that. It is the word of God, and we know that the word of God created mountains. It created blazing stars and millions of different species of animals. It created you. And if it created you, then it can recreate you.

This is crucial to remember when the world tells us that the Bible equips us to do bad works, not good works. We live in a time when many people don’t just tolerate Christians. They despise us. They think that what we believe about gender and sexuality is abhorrent and disgusting. And so they work as hard as they can to convince us to stop looking to the Bible for what it means to do good, and to look to the world instead. My friends, don’t give in to this pull. We can’t stop looking at the book to equip us for “every good work”. The secular society around us takes for granted that many of its moral standards are based on the Christian worldview. The Bible has been and continues to be the primary reason why our society is as stable and as prosperous as it is. So if the Bible got so much right, we should be hesitant to conclude that it got gender and sexuality wrong.

**CONCLUSION**

Finally, let me conclude by acknowledging that the authority of the Scriptures is a massive topic that no one can tackle adequately in one sermon. I recognize that many of you may still have questions, not only today, but throughout this series. I want you to feel comfortable to approach me after the service to ask me any questions you may have. I may not know the answer, but I promise you I will do my best to find the best answers possible.

But the beauty of our text today is that it teaches us that trust in the authority of the Bible is not just an intellectual exercise. No one is ever persuaded into believing in its authority. The types of things that give us confidence in its authority go much deeper than head knowledge. They appeal to the precious relationships that we have had with our spiritual mentors. They appeal to our love for the gospel. And they appeal to the tangible power we’ve experienced in seeing the Bible’s power to change us into better people. This is where our confidence comes from. May the Lord help us to trust in his word always.