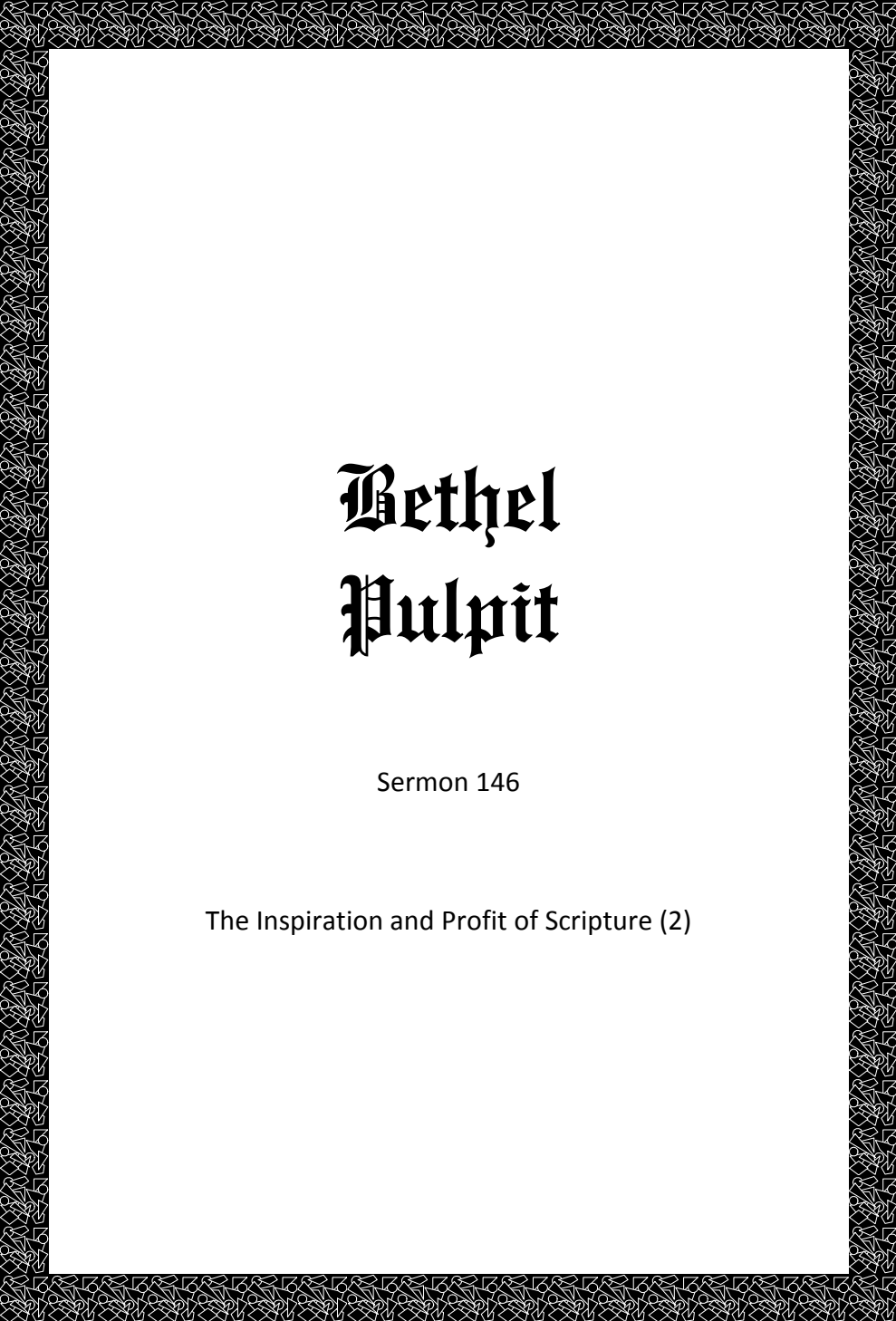




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 146

The Inspiration and Profit of Scripture (2)

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 8th June, 1997**

Text: *"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" (2 Timothy 3. 16, 17).*

It was a British prime minister who used that beautiful expression, "the impregnable rock of holy Scripture." Beloved friends, that is just what we believe. It is one of the things most surely believed amongst us. "The impregnable rock of holy Scripture." No book has been more assailed. There have even been bonfires of Bibles. Atheists have denied its authority. But it still stands. If you read the last page of the Bible, you will see the everlasting doom of all those who add to Scripture or take from it, and that makes us tremble, because our carnal hearts love taking away from Scripture and adding to it. "The impregnable rock of holy Scripture." May we not be shaken on this point. May we hold it fast, and may we hold it dear, that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God." If it could be proved that one part of Scripture was wrong, then why not all? And how may we know that our most sacred portions, the ones we love the most, are among the inspired parts?

I think most of you have heard of Abraham Kuyper, prime minister of the Netherlands, who was also a preacher and theologian. I have read that as a young person, he denied the inspiration of Scripture, and a simple-minded woman in his congregation took him at his word, and if he said one part was not inspired, she would go home and cut it out. One day, she was in great trouble and he went to see her, and she handed him her Bible. It was mutilated, and he was shocked. He asked about it, and when she explained to him, it came as such a shock, he was brought to repentance and brought to be one of the firmest advocates for the inspiration and infallibility of holy Scripture. *"All Scripture."* If you begin to doubt one, what about the rest?

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." Beloved friends, may we be brought to love the Scriptures more and more. I believe one mark of the Spirit's work in the new birth is a love for the Word of God.

You have perhaps read it before, carelessly, casually, but now you read it differently. May I affectionately ask you, have you been brought to love the holy Scriptures? May I just say a word to those who long have feared the Lord's name. Do you still love the holy Scriptures? Our carnal minds have a kind of sinful aversion to the Word of God. But may I also ask you, do you read the Word of God? And does it ever read you? "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me." There are some people, I think some political Protestants, who would literally fight to the death for the infallibility of Scripture, but they never open the Bible and read it. O do we believe what we do believe? God, the great, almighty God, has given a Book to sinful creatures. We believe it is inspired. Do we reverence it? Do we believe it? Do we pray over it? May each one be led more and more by the Holy Spirit of truth to read the Word of God, and may there be those open eyes and open hearts. May there be the Holy Spirit leading into the truth, and the Holy Spirit's application of the truth to our hearts and conscience.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable." Now do pray as you read the Scriptures that they might be profitable. When you come to chapel to hear preaching, pray that it might be profitable. In one of J. C. Philpot's wonderful new year addresses, he takes the analogy of a tradesman at the end of the year balancing his books and he has the profit on one side and the loss on the other, and very beautifully he goes into both sides. It is a wonderful thing if at times we can pause and spiritually consider our lives and experience, if there is any profit from the Word of God, if there is any profit from the Scriptures of truth.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable." I spoke to you rather at length this morning on how the Word of God is profitable for doctrine, the glorious doctrines of the gospel, the doctrine of salvation. Very briefly I tried to go through them, but especially linking this with the verse before: "The holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." That is the greatest profit you will ever find in Scripture, if under the Holy Spirit's teaching the holy Scriptures make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” Beloved friends, I have often looked at this verse, and it is not what you would expect: doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness. I do not think that is what you and I would write down if we were asked to write down what is the real profit of Scripture. I think we might take this first point, *doctrine*, although we might not put it in exactly the same way. But Scripture is profitable “for reproof, for correction.” We do not hear very much about that, do we? If you read a book on the authority of Scripture, if you go to a Bible Society meeting, it is very seldom you hear a person speaking of Scripture being profitable for reproof, for correction. But God Himself has said it and He has repeated it: not just reproof, but correction; not just correction, but reproof.

One thing is clear. In our lost, ruined condition, the state we are in by nature, we certainly need reproof for the way in which we are walking, enmity against God, going headlong to a lost eternity. And we certainly need our way correcting. And that is what takes place when God calls a sinner by grace. He will reprove you and correct you. So how profitable is the Word of God! All Scripture is profitable, in the beginning of your spiritual experience, the beginning of a work of grace, when it finds you out, shows you where you are wrong, convinces you of your sin, reveals the emptiness of the world and its pleasures, shows you the solemnity of eternity, tells you you must die. But then as it points you to a dear Saviour who came to seek and to save that which was lost.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable ... for reproof, for correction.” But also all the way through our spiritual pilgrimage we do need the Lord to reprove us, we do need the Lord to correct us, because so often we are wrong, so often we are making mistakes. And God uses His holy Word that we might be reproved, that we might be corrected. I feel that this is one of the most important parts of real religion, one of the most important parts of experimental religion, but you will not hear people talk much about it. You will hear a thousand times more of people in an exercise and the Word of God was very profitable to tell them everything they were doing was right (and perhaps everything everyone else was doing was wrong!) It is not very often you hear a person speaking of how the Word comes for reproof, for correction. How long is it since you came to chapel and the Word of God found you out and you were reproved, corrected? How long is it since you had to go

home from chapel and there was something in your life, something you had been doing, or perhaps something you had not been doing, and the next day you had to put it right?

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable ... for reproof, for correction.” The older I get, I do have to thank God for His reproof and for His correction. Something you are going to do, and you think it is right, and the Lord lays a word on your spirit that it is not right for you to do it. Or something you were not thinking of doing, you did not want to do, and the Lord lays another word on your spirit, and you have got to do it. Or sometimes you are thinking and meditating, and the Lord corrects you. He reproves you. He shows you your spirit is wrong. “By these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit.” “For if ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons.” What would you think of a parent who never says *No* to a child, who does not restrain that child? The awful sin of Eli for which the whole of his family were separated from the priesthood for ever. “For them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.” It is an oft-quoted Scripture, but do not forget, godly Eli was in the second half of it: “They that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.” Are there any here who are despising the Lord because you do not reprove, you do not correct?

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable ... for reproof, for correction.” It is a wonderful thing when the Lord shows us we are wrong, shows us the way we are going is going to end in disaster, shows us this other way is dishonouring to His name; when He closes a wrong door, opens a right door. Do you know anything of this experience? “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable ... for reproof, for correction.” We do want to be led in our pilgrimage, to be shown the way we are to go. And surely this is one great part of divine leading. The Lord says, “Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.” You hardly know what to do. It is an important matter. You feel something must be done. So you commit your work to the Lord and then you seek to venture. “Thy thoughts shall be established.” The Lord uses His Word to show you this is not right, this is wrong. You have to bless Him for it, His gracious leading, because He knows best.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable ... for reproof, for correction.” My mind has been hovering about many occasions in my life. I remember once since I was at Luton. In my study one day there was something I was going to do. (It was not something you would say was wicked or wrong.) Most powerfully the Lord brought that word: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord.” It is profitable for reproof, for correction. I go back to my earlier days. Someone once asked to see me, and he had some complaint, and looking back, it was an unjustifiable complaint. As I went to speak to him, the Lord dropped that word in my heart: “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: ... therefore let thy words be few.” That clear restraining and reproof and showing the way in which to walk.

It is a wonderful thing when the Lord comes and reproves us and corrects us by His Word. “Not in anger, but from His dear covenant love.” “If ye endure chastening” – this reproof, this correction – “God dealeth with you as with sons.” There is nothing worse than if you are acting wrongly, making a wrong move, in a wrong spirit, and God does not reprove, God does not correct; nothing worse if you are being carried away with idolatry and the Lord says, “Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.” It is a wonderful thing to know these loving, tender, kind reproofs and corrections from the Lord through His Word. If your religion is real, you will find this check on your spirit, this check on your conscience, perhaps some undiscovered sin, something you thought was right and it was wrong. When you read the Bible morning and evening, when you come to chapel and hear it preached, not just to tell you you are right and everybody else is wrong, but to correct you and reprove you. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction.” Perhaps some of you did not expect to hear things like this, but the Lord says it twice. He says it and He repeats it: for reproof, for correction.

Then the next thing He lists: “instruction in righteousness.” Of course, we do need to be instructed and we do have this in Scripture concerning our lack of a righteousness which will avail in God’s sight and the wonderful provision of a righteousness in Christ, that glorious righteousness which is by imputation unto all and upon all that believe. “Instruction in righteousness.” But I believe rather the word here means to

walk in the ways of righteousness, the believer's life, to be graciously instructed in the way he is to live, the way he is to walk. It is a wonderful thing: "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord." The Holy Spirit is the Teacher, the Instructor, and He instructs according to His Word.

Now I would say this as a caution to you. If the Lord is teaching you, He will never teach you contrary to His Word. If you are praying for God's leading, God will never lead you contrary to His Word. Some people sometimes pray and they say, "I am seeking God's will in this matter." If it is forbidden, there will be no further light. You remember when J. C. Philpot was first convinced of the errors of the Church of England, and he was a minister in the Established Church. He prayed for three or four years that the Lord would show him whether he should leave or not. He did not want to leave. Really, it was killing the goose that laid the golden egg, to use his own expression. It was going to be such a sacrifice for him. One day, the Lord showed him he was doing things that were wrong. He was administering the Lord's supper, and there was a notorious adulterer and a man who was generally suspected of murder. The Lord taught him that if the Word of God is clear on any matter, you cannot pray, should I do it?

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable ... for instruction in righteousness." We do need to be taught by the Lord, and it is a wonderful thing when the Lord does teach His people. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us." The grace of God teaches. There is so much we need to learn, so much we do not know. That prayer, I have to use it so much: "That which I see not teach Thou me." But this gracious instruction, and the Lord instructs you through the Scriptures. "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with Mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee."

"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." Now of course, the Apostle Paul by "the man of God" especially means a gospel minister, and he is thinking especially of Timothy. So in this sense, when he says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is

profitable for doctrine,” he is saying, “Timothy, this is where you are going to find doctrine: in holy Scripture; not in the holy fathers, not in tradition, not in rabbinical law, but in the Scriptures. There is everything you need there. And if you have to fight against error in the enemies of the truth, here you have it in Scripture, for reproof and correction. And when you have to reprove the people, when you have to correct them, may it always be according to Scripture, and may it be Scripture you use. And as you seek to speak the truth and instruct them in righteousness, preach the Word, preach Christ crucified.” So here especially the Apostle Paul is speaking of a preacher of the gospel, and he is thinking of Timothy. But having said that, not only a minister, not solely a minister. “The man of God.” There have been some people in our churches and people have said, “Well, he is a man of God.” I think this is the description that is continually given to Moses: Moses, the man of God. A lot of other things might be said about Moses. Some people have thought he was the greatest man who ever lived. He was the leader of Israel. But this was his most honoured title: Moses, the man of God. Well, if your religion is real, you will be a man of God or a woman of God.

“That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” Let me be very, very clear at the beginning. This Word *perfect* does not mean completely free from sin. Some people stumble about these places in Scripture where we are told to be perfect. I suppose that is how the old error of sinless perfection first arose in the church. “That the man of God may be perfect.” Even in normal conversation, we often use this word *perfect* and we do not mean free from sin. You might say someone is a perfect fool. You might even go so far as to say a man is perfectly evil. You mean completely evil, wholly evil, entirely evil. That is what this scripture means here. “That the man of God may be perfect.” If you will, complete. If you will, entire. And really the Holy Spirit explains it for us: “thoroughly furnished.” Timothy has to preach. Every child of God has a life to live, a conflict, a pilgrimage, a warfare. So weak, so helpless, so unworthy; sin, Satan, the world, temptation so strong. “That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished.” If you will, that is complete provision for the life of faith, complete provision for the Christian life. And the apostle says it is all to be found there in Scripture.

“That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” Somebody was once asked, “What do you believe at your

chapel?” She said, “Well, we do not believe in good works.” She misunderstood the point, didn’t she? We *do* believe in good works, and there is no heaven without good works, but a person is not saved on the ground of his good works. Wasn’t it Calvin who said, “A sinner is saved by faith alone, by faith in Jesus alone; but true faith is never found alone”? If you will, the precious faith in Jesus is like the good root of the tree, and the good works, or the consistent life, are as the fruit upon the branches.

“That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” If your religion and mine is real, then we are called to live a life of good works – not *for* salvation, but springing *from* salvation. There are one or two scriptures on this, perhaps not quoted as often as they should be. “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” And then again, Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Now the Lord calls you to that holy life, that separate life, that life lived to His honour and glory; in scriptural terms, that life of good works.

“That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” There are many things that Spurgeon said and did that we do not agree with, but there are also some very good and very gracious things he said. One Lord’s day evening he had been speaking very clearly and very strongly on salvation by grace, salvation in Christ. Afterwards, a woman came to his vestry angry. She said, “Mr. Spurgeon, do you not believe in good works?” He said, “Madam, do you not believe in chimneys?” She said, “Of course I believe it. Houses need chimneys.” He said, “I need a chimney on my house, but I would not want it to be the foundation on which my house is built.” Good works are needful, and they must be there, but not as the foundation on which the church is built.

“That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” Paul takes up this important matter. A child of God, a sinner saved by grace, is called to live this holy life, this sanctified life, for where a sinner is justified, that sinner is sanctified. You cannot have the one without the other. Here is this sinner, weak, unworthy, and temptation and sin so great. How can he live his life? Completely furnished, completely provided for. Really, this is the same point I was trying to

speak to you from a week or two ago: “Ye are complete in Him” – concerning your standing, complete in Christ’s righteousness and blood, but for your life, your pilgrimage, completely provided for, completely furnished. Like that good soldier of Ephesians 6; he is completely furnished. He has a helmet of salvation, and a breastplate of righteousness, and his feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, and the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit – completely furnished.

But the apostle is saying, “It is all in holy Scripture.” This is one reason why Scripture is given: “That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” Well then, how does the Bible, the holy Word of God, furnish you unto all good works? In two ways. First of all, the Holy Scriptures clearly point out the way in which, as a believer, you are called to live, the things you are to do, the things you are not to do. Here we have the standard, the rule of faith for our life. It is according to the holy Scriptures, what God says, not what people think; what the Lord commands, not what you and I would like. So in the holy Scriptures we have the clear teaching of the Lord concerning how His people should live, how they should behave. And of course there are the general exhortations like these: “I ... beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.” “Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us.” These general exhortations. Then there are more particular ones. They touch everything: how we should behave, how we should speak, how we should dress, our relationships one to another, how we should worship, conduct in the house of God, husbands and wives, wives and husbands, masters and servants, servants and masters, parents with their children, children with their parents. You have everything set out in detail, and it is a perfect standard, an ideal standard. It is not just what someone thinks or someone’s opinion. It is the way the Lord has laid down, the way His people are to behave. It is set out there so clearly. And in its fullest sense, it is constrained by love, following the pattern of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, not legally.

“That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” How do the holy Scriptures furnish us, provide for us? There are two ways. First of all, the Scriptures set out so clearly the way we are to go, the way we are to behave; but secondly and vitally, the Scriptures point out to us where we are to obtain strength, where we are to

find grace, how it is possible to endure to the end, how we can be kept from falling, all these things. And of course, all Scripture is profitable in this: that it shows you everything in the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Now that is it. That is the vital thing here.

“That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” The holy Scriptures are profitable. They show you how you are to walk, how you are not to walk. But then they show you in Christ, the full provision. And when the Scriptures are made precious, and the gospel affects your heart, you are led into this personally, feelingly, experimentally, to be completely furnished.

“Whate’er I need in Jesus dwells,
And there it dwells for me;
'Tis Christ my earthen vessel fills
With treasures rich and free.”

That is to be perfectly furnished, to be thoroughly furnished. The Scriptures give all the honour and glory to the Lord Jesus. The Scriptures put the crown on His head. The Scriptures reveal Him as the perfect Saviour. The Scriptures set Him forth in all His grace and mercy and love. That is how the man of God is perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works: in Christ, as the Holy Spirit leads the sinner to Christ, to find everything there. “It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell” – all the wisdom you need to deal with your problems and perplexities and direct your way; all the strength you need in all the dangers and difficulties of your pilgrimage. “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” All the faithfulness and compassion you need in your times of sorrow and misery and distress; and all the grace you need to forgive your sins, and to be with your spirit, and to lead you aright, and to uphold you, to abound towards you. It is all in Christ. And beloved friends, that is the glory of the holy Scriptures, and that is their true profit, that they speak of a dear, loving, almighty Saviour, Jesus the Son of God, who left heaven for earth, who lived and died and rose again, who made atonement for sin, who now for ever lives and reigns at God’s right hand, who ever intercedes, who forgives, who is full of mercy, full of grace. And all this is revealed in Scripture, and revealed to the soul of the believer in Scripture by the power of the Holy Ghost personally, that you might find in this glorious Saviour everything you can ever need.

“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, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

(The morning sermon on the same text was published last month.)