

Using the Bible to Make Enemies

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good day to you, Table Church. My name is Anthony Parrott, and I'm the lead pastor here, and it is great to worship with you, to gather with you, even in this format. We're so confident and faithful and hopeful that the Holy Spirit, which resides in us, is doing something good, is up to something good, and we're grateful for our worship team. We're grateful for our worship director, Jordan, and how he leads this very incredibly talented team of folks each and every week to guide us into God's presence. What we're doing right now is we're in the middle of a series called The Church of Us Versus Them, and what we're doing is we are exploring all of the ways that we fall prey to the enemy-making machine, the ways that we fall prey to seeing somebody else and making them and us and us, of them being our enemies and we being the only right ones in the world.

And how do we stop that enemy-making machine? Because I don't know if you've noticed, there's a lot of enemies. It seems like more and more every day for us to say who we're against, who we're for, how we're right, how everyone else is wrong. So last week, just kind of as a review, we talked about three ways that we know that we are caught up in the enemy-making machine. Number one is through banners. A banner is basically a belief, subtract, practice. You've got yourself a banner. It's something that we can say, a label that we can apply to ourselves or to someone else to say that this is what defines us, this is what makes us, and therefore, there's a them and there's an us. And when we take our beliefs and we get rid of practice, then we're stuck with a banner.

Another way that we know that we're caught up in the enemy-making machine is through reverse definition. When we only know who we are by what we're not, we only know what we're for by what we're against. And so reverse definition is really a way of letting other people take up rent for free in our brain and getting to decide who we are and what we're about and what we like and what we don't like. Reverse definition is really a way of letting yourself become enmeshed in somebody else. And then we really know that we're deep into the enemy-making machine when we fall prey to perverse pleasure, shading through the idea of getting enjoyment out of someone else's pain. And that means that in some way, our well-being becomes dependent on someone else's lack of well-being. We feel good about ourselves if someone else loses, if someone else fails, if someone else has proven wrong, if somebody else doesn't feel good about themselves.

So those are three ways that we talked about last week about how we fall into the enemy-making machine. And we've got three big topics that we're covering over the next three weeks. So this week, we're talking about how do we use the Bible to make enemies. Next week, we'll talk about how to use salvation and conversion to make enemies. And then the week after, the Sunday after, the Thursday and Sunday after the election, God help us all, we'll be talking about how politics and the church help us make enemies. So you can be praying for me, and that one will be like, you know, one of the most difficult sermons just ever for me and every pastor in the country. So let's this week talk about scripture, how we use scripture to make enemies. Because the Bible is the number one way, and at least what I've seen, what I've experienced, the scripture is the number one way that Christians love to make enemies of other Christians and other non-Christians. We've got this collection of 66 books, some traditions have a few more, 66 books bound up in a book called the Bible, called scripture, called the

Hebrew scripture in the New Testament, the Old Testament, the New Testament. We have this book, and based off of what it says, we use it to make enemies, and us and them, who we're for and what we're against, and we use these pages of this book to make enemies. And I'm sure that if you've hung out in Christian circles for any amount of time, and if you haven't, that's fine. But if you did, you would hear lots of banners, so belief minus practice equals banner, you hear lots of banners and slogans, things like, well, is it biblical or unbiblical? Hey, your lifestyle, it's unbiblical.

You might have been told that at some point in your life. Or, hey, we are a biblical church. Or, you know, we're not like that church down the road because they are unbiblical. You've probably heard things like that.

[4 : 47] You may have heard words tossed around, or maybe you've gone to, like, a beliefs page on a church website, and it uses a word like inerrant. Hey, we believe that the Bible is the inerrant word of God, or it's the infallible, or it's the inspired word of God. Lots of in-words. You'll hear the scripture described as authoritative. We believe that scripture, these 66 books, front to back, they are authoritative. They have authority in our lives. Or, of course, back to Billy Graham and D.L. Moody and all the folks who have gone on to preach in front of big, big crowds will say things like, and I'll say things like this even today, well, the Bible says, as if those three words, the Bible says, by themselves settle the matter. It's biblicalism. These are all banners that people will wave to say, like, hey, look at me.

This way you know what kind of club we're in, what kind of group we're a part of. We're this kind of church. We're a biblical church. We're not one of those unbiblical churches. We believe in the authority of scripture. We're not one of those churches that don't believe in the authority of scripture. Now, the way I know that these are banners is that there's a problem with these kinds of words, inerrant and authority and infallible, and the Bible says. And that's what one sociologist calls the problem of, here comes a big \$10 term, pervasive interpretive pluralism.

Pervasive interpretive pluralism, which is basically a really fancy way of saying nobody can agree on what the Bible actually says. I don't know if you've noticed, but there are lots of disagreements about what Billy Graham would say the Bible says.

This is what one scholar, Robert Johnston, wrote back in the 60s. He said, to argue that the Bible is authoritative, authoritative, but to be unable to come to anything like agreement on what it says is self-defeating. This is what Tertullian, Tertullian was a guy who lived back in the 100s AD, so 20 centuries ago, one of the early church fathers and founders, this is what he said. He says, though you may be most skilled in scriptures. Listen, friends, I have paid a lot of money to get a lot of degrees about what scripture says, so I can relate to what Tertullian is saying here, okay? Though you may be most skilled in the scriptures, you will make no progress when everything which you maintain is denied on the other side, and whatever you deny is by them maintained.

As for yourself, indeed, you will lose nothing but your breath. So this is a problem that has gone on since the Bible was written, where we just can't agree on what the Bible says. There's a series of books that if you go to Amazon and type in four views on or three views on, there's a series of books which you can read about how all sorts of different Christians and scholars and pastors and writers have different views on these really key categorical questions of what the Bible says.

[8 : 03] So I don't know if you remember these like subway commercials that talked about how you could have 38 million combinations of different kinds of sandwiches if you combine all the different ingredients together. If you take these topics that you can find on the four views or three views of scripture, you can come up with five million different belief possibilities if you mix and match these all together. So do you believe in inerrancy or infallibility? Are you a Calvinist or a Minniist or are you an open theist? Do you believe in young earth or six-day creation or day age or restoration views of creation? The divine image, is it substantial or functional or relational? Do you believe in classical Christology or connoted Christology? Are you Lutheran or Reformed or Keswickian or Wesleyan in your views of sanctification? Yes, Keswickian is a real belief. It's a great name. Do you or do you believe in eternal security or conditional security? Destiny of the evangelized, is it that those who have never heard, they go straight to hell or do they get a chance after death to hear the gospel and then they get to decide? These are all possible. I just read part of this slide. These are all possible views that you could hold and say that they're biblical, the Bible says. Sociologist Christian Smith says this. He says, on important matters, the Bible apparently is not clear, consistent, or univocal enough to enable the best-intentioned, most highly skilled believing readers to come to an agreement as to what it teaches. That is an empirical, historical, undeniable, and ever-present reality. It is, in fact, the single reality that is most shaped the organizational and cultural life of the Christian church, which now, particularly in the United States, Christian Smith writes, exists in a state of massive fragmentation. 20,000 denominations in this country alone, 35,000 denominations across the world, all fragmented and separating and creating churches of us versus them based off of what the Bible says.

Now, listen, Table Church, talking to you specifically right now, you just took a survey called the Reveal Survey, which you listed some of your own beliefs about the Bible, and we've got some feelings about the Bible. There is one statement that says this, I believe that the Bible has decisive authority over what I say and do, to which the Table Church, compared to a database of 2,000 other churches and 200,000 other respondents, we got the second percentile, which means that 98% of churches scored higher than the Table Church. We've got some feelings about the Bible and what to do with it.

There's another one. It asked us, I reflect on Scripture's meaning for life on a daily basis, to which 10%, one out of 10 of us, could agree with that statement. I reflect on Scripture's meaning for life on a daily basis. The database average, so again, 2,000 churches, 200,000 other respondents, the database average is around 25%. So even the average church Christian, person who takes the Reveal Survey in North America, about one out of four look at Scripture on a daily basis, for the Table Church, it was about one out of 10. So we've got some feelings about this book that we call the Bible, and we've got some banners that maybe we've waved in the past and we don't wave right now. We've got some banners that we see other churches, other Christians, family members, other pastors, other writers, we've seen them wave the banners of biblical, unbiblical, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, all of those banners that we want to shy away from. So how do we move forward? What do we do with all this? So I want to talk about a verse in the Bible, what the Bible says, I told you I was going to say it, about how Scripture at least describes itself a little bit, and how this verse has kind of been taken to extremes that I don't think it was ever meant to, and how that can lead us perhaps in a less enemy-making pursuit of what the Bible says. And that is 2 Timothy chapter 3, 16. So words are going to be on the screen today. You can take a look at what 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 16 says. This is

Paul, at this point, an elderly church planter who is passing the baton on to his protege, a man named Timothy. And so Timothy is not the author of 2 Timothy. He is the recipient of this letter. And this is what Paul writes to Timothy. He says that all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3, 16. So I've got three words highlighted here, God-breathed, useful, and equipped. That's kind of going to be the structure of what we're talking about. So let's talk about that first phrase, God-breathed. Depending on the translation that you might have, you may see the word inspired, something like that. Every piece of Scripture has the inspiration of God or God-breathed. And the original word in the Greek language with which the New Testament was written in, it's theopneustos, theopneustos, God-breathed. And panustos is the word used in the New Testament for wind or spirit. And so the Holy Spirit is the hagiopneuma, the Holy Spirit. And so something God-breathed is the theopneustos, the wind, the spirit, the air that God breathes. And Paul is telling his protege Timothy, this fellow church planter, that all Scripture is God-breathed. Now from that verse, that passage, there have been tons and tons and tons of things written and claimed about what that means. If you were Timothy and you hear Paul or read Paul in a letter to you, use that phrase, God-breathed. Timothy grew up as a Jew. He grew up as an Israelite in the first century. And Jews in those days very likely memorized the majority of what we call the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures. They would have known it literally backwards and forwards. They could have heard a verse spoken about Scripture, and they would know what the verse before it says and the verse after it says. They studied this stuff day in and day out.

[14 : 31] This was their life, the Scriptures. And so when Paul writes how all Scripture is God-breathed, there's little bells going off in Timothy's mind about like, well, I know a couple other things that are God-breathed. For instance, jump back all the way to the beginning, Genesis chapter 2, verse 7. We see this beautiful image of the Creator, Yahweh God, forming humanity from the dust of the ground. And then listen, listen, and then breathed into their nostrils the breath of life, and that human became a living being. And so God scoops up the atomah, the dust, the dirt of the ground, and then breathes into it. God breathed into the atomah, the ground, and it becomes a living being.

And so when Timothy hears God-breathed, of course, the image of the second chapter of Scripture, God-breathed Adam, humanity, comes to mind. There would be another one, a passage that was spoken of constantly in first century Judaism when it came to the expectations of what the Messiah was going to do about what would happen when God came back and finally put an end to the exile. And that's Ezekiel chapter 37. It's this famous scene of dim bones, dim bones, dim dry bones.

Ezekiel seeing an image of a valley of dry bones, and God puts the bones back together, puts skin and muscle back onto these bones. And then Ezekiel writes this, he says, I looked, and behold, there was no breath in them. And then Yahweh said to me, prophesy to the breath and say to it, this is what the Almighty Yahweh says, come, breath from the four winds, and breathe into these slain that they may live. And breath entered them, and they came to life and stood up.

It's a good Halloween passage. So Timothy hears Paul say, all Scripture is God-breathed. The images coming into Timothy's mind are going to be that of the Adam, the first human being, God breathing into their nostrils, and that person becoming a living being. Of course, the image of the dry bones in the valley, God using his breath, calling his breath to bring life again. And then there's one more image that Timothy may or may not have been completely aware of, but we know it from the stories of Jesus in John chapter 20. Jesus has died, he's been resurrected, and he shows up to his disciples to tell them about what's going to happen next. And so Jesus says to his disciples, as the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with that, Jesus, recalling Genesis chapter 2, creation, and now Jesus brings about new creation, Jesus breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit, the Pneuma, the Holy Spirit of God. Jesus breathes on them, receive the Holy Spirit. And so what God did in Genesis chapter 2 with creation, with creating a human being from the dust of the ground, Jesus doesn't do with the disciples by sending his Spirit into them. He breathes into them and calls them sent ones. And so God breathed is referred to in two ways.

What Paul says, scripture, and then what we see throughout the rest of the testimony of the Bible, human beings. Now, I don't know about you, but the human beings that I have encountered in my life, I would not use words like inerrant or infallible with them. Maybe you've met some better human beings than I have. I've met some decent ones. Those are not the words that I would use to describe these God-breathed people that God has placed into my life and then into yours.

There's a different scholar, a guy by the name of Pete Enns, an Old Testament professor, and he got in trouble for writing a book called Inspiration and Incarnation. And he used the analogy of the incarnation of what scripture is like. Now, the incarnation is this mystery of the Christian faith where we claim that Jesus of Nazareth, this historical human being in the first century in Galilee, Palestine, under the Roman Empire, Jesus of Nazareth was somehow, some way, both entirely human flesh and bone and sinew and had an appetite and had hair and had to shave and then stopped shaving because he was Jewish, a human being and 100% completely fully divine. The Venn diagram of humanity and divinity completely overlapping. And what Pete Enns said in his book Inspiration and Incarnation said that scripture seems to share a lot of these same characteristics.

[19:23] of something God-breathed about it, something divine and something human. And even without focusing on humanity for a second, the fully fallen nature of humanity, the people that you know and I know who mess up and fail and break our hearts, we can just talk about this Jesus, this human, divine, God, man, person. And what scripture says about Jesus, Jesus, Luke chapter 2, 52, Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and favor with God and humans. So yes, Jesus was completely divine and yet at the same time, Jesus grew in wisdom. Jesus, in Matthew 15, 28, with this encounter with a Syrophenician woman who asked to be healed and Jesus says like, oh, that's not really my mission. And the woman says like, look, even the dogs get the scraps and get the scraps and Jesus says, you have great faith, you are going to be healed.

Jesus changed his mind. In Hebrews chapter 5, verse 8, the writer of Hebrews, she writes that Jesus learned obedience. Jesus learned things, this fully human, fully divine God, man. And we see through the crucifixion that Jesus, this human, divine person, was altered, scarred, marred by humans, through which, in some mysterious way, God's glory still shines through, even through the ugliness of the cross and Jesus on it. So if these are all things that we can say of Jesus, then I think God-breathed must mean that scripture, we can say some of these same things, that scripture is capable of growing in wisdom. I think oftentimes we make the mistake of assuming that all scripture needs to be read as equally timeless truths, that we read it flatly outside of any context, which often leads into the enemy-making machine. You quote a verse, I quote a verse right back at you, as if every single verse should be treated equally. But if Jesus can grow in wisdom, if scripture is God-breathed, if humans are God-breathed, then maybe scripture is capable of growing in wisdom as well. Maybe scripture is capable of changing its mind, of stating and thinking and presenting one thing, and then over time, perhaps presenting or thinking another. It's capable of learning, if Jesus was capable of learning wisdom, of learning obedience, like Hebrews chapter says, is it possible the scripture is also capable of learning? Which, I don't know your definition of learning, but it

basically means it didn't know something, and then it did know something. And this is not controversial language.

Paul says this all the time about the mystery of Jesus showing up on planet earth, that the mystery was revealed in ages past, and now at the culmination of the ages, the apostle Paul writes, the mystery has been revealed. Is it possible that scripture, just like Jesus and the ugliness of the cross, was also altered and even marred by humans? That God's glory can still shine through. So when we read that word, God-breathed, all scripture is God-breathed, 2 Timothy 3.16, all scripture is God-breathed, inspired, whatever word you want to use, let's not fill that word with a bunch of meaning it was never meant to have. That somehow scripture can't grow or learn or be marred by humanity. So scripture is God-breathed. Number two, scripture is useful. And we still fall prey to this enemy-making machine where perhaps we've been wounded and hurt by those who wield banners like biblical and inerrancy and authority. And they wield those words against us. And so our reaction to say is to say, well, scripture is just worthless. What's the point? Let's just move on with our lives.

The verse says that scripture is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, training. Scripture is up to something to shape us and form us for good. And many of us, we've been so hurt that we want to say, well, maybe that's just not true anymore. But when we do that, we're ignoring a large part of history. And we don't have time to go into all the nuances of this tonight, but I want to present, at least suggest the case that Christians, people who said something about the Bible being God-breathed and useful, Christians were the folks who were up to some of the first soup kitchens in history, and hospitals, and homeless shelters, and hospice care, and infant adoption, and prison reform, and not having discrimination about who got what kind of care, or kind of food, or labor laws. It was Christians, people who said that scripture was useful, who were some of the revolutionaries, some of the folks who clicked society and civilization forward in meaningful ways, because they looked at scripture and said, there might be something useful here.

[24 : 49] Now, that's not to deny the many, many, many, many times where folks did the opposite, wielding a Bible in hand, and used it to hurt, and to harm, and to marginalize, and to bring scarring to civilization.

But just because that's true, doesn't mean that the other is not. And so when Paul tells Timothy, scripture is God-breathed, and scripture is useful, we owe it to ourselves to at least remember that scripture hasn't always been used to hurt and to harm. And when we abandon it because of those who would use it to hurt and to harm, then we're also abandoning one of the primary tools that people have had to move civilization forward. And we're basically giving up this piece of literature to those who would use it to hurt and to harm, and say, you have it, we don't want it. So I think it's helpful to remember that there is something useful about scripture. Which brings us to the third main word for tonight. All scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. And the key word is equipped here. Scripture ought to do something to us. Again, this is the whole belief minus practice equals banner, equals dogma, equals ideology, equals a slogan. If we subtract practice from what we believe, then yes, scripture is pointless. If scripture is only used as a banner to hurt and to harm and to wound others, if scripture is only used as a way to define the them and the us and to draw the big, thick lines in the sand of we've got it right and they've got it wrong, but it doesn't actually shape us or form us to make this world more beautiful, then yeah, go ahead and abandon scripture. What's the point? If scripture is not forming you to be more joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, self-controlled, I would add, just and justice-seeking kinds of people, it's just become a mere enemy-making banner. So how do we move forward? I don't know if any of you all remember English class, but you may have learned about the five-act drama. Shakespeare often used a five-act drama in his plays, and it's still used in movies and musicals today, where five-act drama begins with prologue, the opening, the thing that sets up what's going to happen and what the show is about. There's the prologue, and then that moves into conflict.

Something has gone wrong. Something is deterring our heroes, our protagonists from their goal. They have messed up or somebody else has messed up, and now they have to figure out what they're going to do about it, which leads to rising action and rising tension. What's going to happen? Will they succeed?

Can they figure it out? Things keep going wrong, and things keep getting worse, which then leads to the climax of the story, where we know, okay, at last our heroes have succeeded, and what they are meant to do, and then that leads to what's the French called denouement, the resolution. Okay, after the climax, what now are we left with? How will things finally conclude? And one New Testament scholar, N.T. Wright, suggests that when we speak of Scripture having authority, maybe we should see Scripture as being like a five-act play. Imagine that we discovered, somebody discovered, it wouldn't be me, it'd be somebody else, a new play by Shakespeare, and what we had with this play was Acts 1 through 4, prologue, conflict, rising action, climax, and then a big gap of missing text, and then a little bit of the conclusion, a little bit of knowing how the end of the story is. So what would you do with that play?

[29 : 18] N.T. Wright suggests you would give it to a group of well-trained, some of the world's best Shakespearean actors. They've acted in all the plays, they've studied Shakespeare, his quirks, how he writes, how he writes his characters, what his characters are like, how he likes things to rise and fall in the tension of the story, and you would hand it to them, have them master it, learn it backwards and forwards, and then you would say, and then improvise the ending. Improvise the final act. And the actors, knowing what they know about the story writer and the storyteller, and knowing what they know about what the first four parts of the story are about, could then improvise that final act, also knowing how the story ends. And they couldn't start doing scenes from like *Death of a Salesman* or *Hamilton*. They couldn't just start a new show. They'd have to stay faithful to what had come before. And so N.T.

Wright suggests that we understand scripture as a five-act drama as well. You have Genesis chapter 1 and 2, you have creation, the beginning of the story, the prologue, where everything is set about how the world is meant to be. And then there is conflict and drama, and there's a snake and a tree and a fruit and two people who rebel. And it's not just a story of what happened, but what still happens with people.

And then you have God initiating the great rescue of creation through Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the nation of Israel. And there's rising tension, and they seem to be moving in the right direction.

And then they take two steps back, and there is the rising tension of the story. And then you at last meet Jesus, who nothing makes sense about Jesus unless you know the beginning and the middle of the story, who comes as the climax of Israel's story, to be at last God in the flesh, the portable temple walking around, and then God himself dying on the world's behalf. And then coming back and saying to the church, now finish the story. And so we as the church are now the improvisers. We as the church are the ones who need to know the story and need to know the storyteller so that we can faithfully improvise our way to the conclusion. Now the act of improvisation does not mean that we get to make it up from nothing. It doesn't mean that we ignore what happened in the past. Say you were a really big fan of sycamore trees. You loved them so much. You loved them so much that every acorn you saw, you threw it away. It would make no sense. Say that you had a baby, and the baby at last becomes a toddler a two- or three-year-old, and they can walk, and they can talk a little bit. Your happiness at that toddler stage isn't to go back and delete every photo you have of the baby. And so our work as Act 5 improvisers is to become that much more diligent in understanding where we came from so we can have any hope of knowing where we're going. Our call, based off of all we know about Acts 1 through 4, is to faithfully and creatively improvise Act 5 in anticipation of the grand finale, which may in fact be the beginning of a brand new play, when Jesus returns, and our call is to invite others into that grand story. And this is how we escape the enemy-making machine, the church of us versus them, because stories aren't about propositional statements. Stories aren't about, well, you're wrong and I'm right. Stories you invite people into. Stories you invite people to join along.

And so we escape the enemy-making machine by refusing to use the story as a weapon, and just piecing out when someone tries to use it as a weapon against us. Our call is to be faithful storytellers with a group of improvisers that we gather with us so that we stay faithful to the story and to the storyteller.