

The Divine Efficacy Of Holy Scripture

The modern theologians, who refuse to “identify” Scripture with the Word of God, not only give Scripture, God’s own and inviolable Word, all sorts of abusive names (“paper pope,” “a codex of laws fallen from heaven,” etc.), but they also ascribe to the Scriptures [evil](#) results, which they comprehend under such terms as “intellectualism,” etc. They say the “psychological connection” is lacking if Scripture is brought into contact with man so directly as is done when Scripture is made the only source and norm of doctrine. But as a matter of fact, since the Scriptures alone among all books of the world are God’s Word out and out, they alone have the *vis vere divina* outright.

Wherein does the divine efficacy of [Holy Scripture](#) consist? In its effecting in man such things as far exceed human power.

The Word of the Law (νόμος πνευματικός), as it is revealed in Holy Scripture, has the inherent power to work such a knowledge of sin that man realizes his eternal damnation and despairs of all self-help (*contritio, terrores conscientiae*). Rom. 3:20: “By the Law is the knowledge of sin.” True, man may arrive at a partial knowledge of his sinfulness by virtue of the divine Law as it is written in the heart of natural man also after the Fall.

But while this knowledge suffices to give man an [evil](#) conscience, it is not sufficient to effect a complete collapse of man before God and to cause him to despair of all self-help. Natural man rather turns from one form of self-help to another, even to suicide. For this reason [Christ](#) has commanded in Luke 24:47 that in His name not only “remission of sins” should be preached among all nations, but, preceding that, “repentance.”

The Word of the [Gospel](#) has the inherent power to work faith in the Gospel. Rom. 10:17: “Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” Thus it creates in man the assurance that his sins are forgiven.

Rom. 5:1: “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our [Lord](#) Jesus Christ.” Human strength and human learning, even at their best, do not suffice to work faith in the Gospel, as Scripture teaches clearly when it says that the crucified [Christ](#) is “unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:23) and that the natural man, the ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος, “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them” (1 Cor. 2:14).

All the children of God in the Old and the New Testament have experienced this truth. They know that their faith is not dependent on their own choice, their “self-assertion,” their “self-determination,” their “self-decision,” etc., but is the result of God’s power and efficacy, which is just as effective as the creative omnipotence by which God made the natural light shine forth out of darkness (Ps. 51:10–12; 2 Cor. 4:6).

The Word of the Gospel, presented in Scripture, has the inherent power to write God’s Law into the heart of man, that is, so to change man inwardly that he gladly subjects himself to God’s Law and willingly and with delight walks in the ways of God according to the new man, which is created in him through faith in the Gospel. Human strength and human training cannot accomplish this change. Rom. 8:7: “The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be.” *“Lex praescribit, evangelium inscribit.”* (Jer. 31:31 ff.)

The Word of the Gospel, presented in Scripture, has the inherent power to deliver man from the fear of death and thus to make him the victor over death. This victory is beyond human power, as Scripture and experience testify. Scripture teaches expressly that all men by nature were all their lifetime subject to bondage through the fear of death (Heb. 2:15) and had no hope. But he who believes the [Gospel](#) rejoices: “O Death, where is thy sting?” (κέντρον—the deadly sting.) “Death cannot destroy forever,” etc. (Stanzas of “Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me?”) This is [essentially](#) the *vis vere “divina”* inhering in the Word of

Scripture, since it is God's Word.

The divine power does not operate outside or alongside the Word, but through the Word and therefore inheres in the Word; that is the plain statement of Scripture, Rom. 10:17 (ἐκ), 1 Pet. 1:23 (διὰ), and must be maintained over against the Reformed, as will be shown in detail in the doctrine of the means of grace. The truth that the *efficientia vere divina*, exerted through the Word of God, is *resistibilis* (Matt. 23:37) will be presented more fully in the doctrine of conversion.

Tags: [Bible](#), [Theology](#)