

## The Bible, God's Word

Abraham Lincoln once said, *"I believe the Bible is the best gift God has given to man--- Take all of this book upon reason that you can, and the balance by faith, and you will live and die a happier and better man."* Someone else noted, *"Other books were given for information. The Bible was given for transformation."*

Great theologians, pastors, and a multiple Christians through the ages praised the Bible and the study of it. The Bible itself encourages us to study it. Read Psalm 119:11.

Perhaps the most significant verses in the Bible on its value is II Timothy 3:16-17. Read those verses.

Those two verses tell us multiple truths about the Bible. The first is that the Bible is no ordinary book because God Himself oversaw its writing. Paul described the Bible, in his letter to Timothy, as **"God-breathed."** Despite what modern critics try to tell us, what we have in the Bible is the message that God wanted to communicate to us. Historically the church has believed and taught what is called *"verbal inspiration"* meaning that in the original copies God worked through His servants to set forth truth and that every word of the Bible is important. Today critics want to talk about just the ideas being true and, in some cases, just certain ideas so that historical notes and scientific statements such as God creating are not viewed as the same as theological statement. The Bible declares that every part of it is true and can be trusted. Read in Matthew 5:18 what Jesus said about Scripture.

Second, Paul wrote in those verses that the Bible is **useful**. The Bible is useful, of course, only if it is used properly. God's Word is useful only if we have it hidden in our hearts and know how to use it properly. When used properly the Bible has infinite worth.

Paul went on to write about what the Bible is useful for, with the first use being that of **teaching**. I know that many Christians see little value in studying biblical doctrine but God thought it was important and gave us Scripture so we would know what to believe and why. Read I Peter 3:15.

If someone asked you tomorrow what it means to be a Christian, why one should to be a Christian, or what the Christian life is all about, could you answer them? You should be able to at least give basic answers and be able to back them up with Scripture. You can spend a lifetime studying God's Word and regularly discover new and exciting truths about God that will make your Christian life more meaningful. As a minimum, however, each of us should be able to talk about basic teachings not under the heading of "I believe" or "I think" but with *"according to"*, and specific passages noted. We should be able to quote relevant verses, if not word for word at least accurately enough that if someone looks it up, they see exactly what you said. It is terrible that the church in general does not include Scripture memorization as part of its program not only for children in particular but for all Christians.

What are some of the areas of teaching that are especially important? First, Scripture was given so God could reveal Himself and His will for us. Psalm 8 talks of the majesty of God as seen in creation and then asks the question in verse 4, **“What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?”** Only the Bible can adequately answer those questions. In addition, it is only in the Bible that we discover that God is not only the creator of all things but holds it all together. Only in the Bible do we learn about the attributes of God such as His holiness, His majesty, His justice, His love etc. We see God in the Bible.

The Bible not only teaches us about God, it also clarifies who man is and perhaps more significantly, what man’s problem is. The Bible tells us that man’s problem is sin, sin that brought about judgment, including a curse on creation, death and ultimately separation from a Holy God if the sin problem is not cared for.

In addition to detailing society’s problem in general and the personal sin problem each of us has, it also teaches us that Jesus provided a solution on the Cross and when we accept that solution, we have a new life in Jesus. Want to know what that new life looks like? It is detailed in the Bible including the ultimate provision of heaven when Jesus returns.

Paul went on in II Timothy 3:16 to tell us the Bible is useful for **rebuking**. No one likes to be rebuked but we know it is essential if we are to get life right. We rebuke our children so they will grow properly and our Heavenly Father, through the Bible, rebukes us so we will mature properly. Whenever we read God’s Word, we should expect that the Holy Spirit will convict us of sin in our lives. The Word of God points out areas of both commission and omission, that is the things we should not be doing and the things we should be doing.

God’s Word is critical in terms of identifying sin. The culture we live in believes everything is relative. Our culture tells us that we can vote on what is and is not sin, the majority wins. It is the Bible, however, that clearly states what God has determined to be right and to be wrong. The Bible is our final authority but to be actively authoritative in our lives we need to know it.

Read Hebrews 4:12. We cannot honestly read God’s Word and not discover that some activity or attitude is not what God created and redeemed us for and, therefore, we are called upon to change.

If Paul had stopped with merely saying that the Bible rebukes, he would have given us only half of what God wants to do for us as we read and study Scripture. Paul added that a third purpose of Scripture is to **correct**. The Bible not only tells us where we are falling short but, and this is important, it tells us how we can correct the errors in our lives. Some people find it easy to tell others what is wrong while never offering a suggestion on how to make it right or better. God’s Word helps us correct or improve ourselves. I Corinthians 12:31 concludes with these words, **“And now I will show you the most excellent way.”** That could be written over all of Scripture. One of the aims of the Bible is to show us a more excellent way to live. Too often people talk of Christianity as a *“do not”* religion, forgetting that for every *“do not”* there is an emphatic *“do!”*

There is a better way and it is found in God's Word. Life lived God's way is always by far the best life. For maximum benefit, follow the creator's instructions.

The fourth purpose is **training in righteousness**. The goal of every believer should be Christ-likeness. We should all aim at growing spiritually. Read about Paul's commitment to growing spiritually in Philippians 3:10-12. Paul wrote that from a prison in Rome very, very late in his life. If Paul knew he still needed to mature in Jesus, so too should we know that. Only as we study the Word will we grow spiritually. Only as we understand His promises more fully can we claim them for our own. Only as we see sin more clearly will we want to avoid it. Knowing God's Word more deeply is the only way we can grow spiritually and enjoy the blessings God has for us as believers. Spiritual growth is biblical saturation.

There is yet another valuable asset of God's word, not listed by Paul in the II Timothy passage but clearly spelled out elsewhere. God's Word is essential to **evangelism**. Read Romans 10:17. In witnessing to our faith, we should share our testimony, but that testimony must be centered on the promises of the Word. Read Isaiah 55:11. Note carefully that it is the Word of God that will not return void, not our clever arguments, well-reasoned proofs etc.

Churches and families must teach God's Word to our children and youth. It is not sufficient for us to give rules or even biblical principles of life if they are not accompanied with biblical proof. Faith does not come apart from or grow apart from God's Word. For too long Christians have told its youth how to live without a biblical passage to support the reality that it is what God wants. Without a biblical mandate our youth can legitimately say, *"That's OK for you but I don't see a need to apply it in my life."* If it does not come with "The Bible says" they are likely to see it as a moral standard of old folks who don't understand today's world.

Re-read II Timothy 3:16-17. Few passages need to be emphasized in the American churches today more than that. Few passages need to be taken more seriously by all Christians than that.