

Why is the Bible Important?

October 16, 2016

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2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, 15 and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

4:1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: 2 proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. 5 As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

STANDING ON THE PROMISES

Most people in the church, think that the Bible is important.

But, why is the Bible important?

Ask that question of 10 different Christians and you are liable to get 10 different answers.

Today's lesson from Paul's second letter to Timothy helps us think about this most important question.

Paul is in prison, and he realizes that his ministry is about over.

So, he needs to pass the torch to Timothy.

What can he say to his young disciple to help him faithfully proclaim the gospel in a time of persecution and upheaval?

Paul concludes that the best thing Timothy can do is stand on the promises of God as found in Scripture. Timothy needs to take the word of God personally.

Twice in our passage for today Paul uses the same phrase, “as for you...” He writes, “As for you, continue in what you have learned...” And “As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist...”

Scripture is not just a passing interest for Timothy.
Scripture is serious business.
It is a lifeline in a stormy sea.

Scripture is a message to be believed and put into practice.

SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION

For Timothy, learning Scripture began at an early age.

His mother Lois and his grandmother Eunice taught Timothy the Hebrew Scriptures.

This provided the foundation for spiritual development later in life.

Take note. Ideally, the Scripture needs to be learned at an early age.

How can parents ensure that this is done?

One simple way to do this is to buy a children’s Bible story book.

Read one of those stories to your children each night before your child goes to bed.

This will help children and parents have a basic understanding of some of the main stories in Scripture.

More than this, it helps develop a spiritual bond between parent and child.

When children learn stories from the Bible from their parents or grandparents, it affects them more than when they learn those same stories from someone else.

SPIRITUAL MENTORS

For Paul, it was important that Timothy stand firm in the faith, but it was also important that he remember “from whom” he learned that faith.

This included not only what Timothy learned from his family from the Old Testament but also what he learned from the Apostle Paul.

And where did Paul learn what he taught Timothy?

Paul learned through the inspiration of the Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:13)

At this time the teachings of Paul were not formally considered to be Scripture.

But, Paul suggested that his letters be read in Christian assemblies, perhaps along with readings from the Hebrew Bible.

He often said that he was speaking in the name of and with the authority of Christ.

And he even calls his teaching the Word of God. (Colossians 4:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 2 Corinthians 2:17, 1 Thessalonians 2:13)

Timothy knew first hand that Paul's speech and writings were inspired by God. His own life had been transformed by Paul's teaching, and he had seen many others changed by these Spirit inspired words.

Most of us can remember several people who were important in our faith development.

Maybe it was a parent or a teacher or a minister or someone else.

But, when those people taught us the promises of God from the Bible, the faith came alive for us.

We not only learned what the Bible said. We believed.

We put our trust in the promises of God as we found them in Scripture.

Our hearts burned with hope.

From time to time we need to remind ourselves of the importance of these promises.

Timothy learned the promises of God at an early age, and that faith was bolstered by the teaching of his mentor, Paul.

But, Timothy needed to "continue" in what he had "learned and firmly believed."

Faith cannot stand still.

Faith is a journey that is guided by the promises of Scripture.

Each new situation offers an opportunity for us to search the Scripture and think about how God's Word might instruct us and save us in our time of need.

These past few weeks I mentioned how the cloud led God's people in the wilderness by day and the pillar of fire led them by night.

We might think of the Bible as that cloud or that pillar of fire. It guides us through our wilderness. It guides us through our long dark night of the soul. It mediates the presence of God to God's people.

THE BIBLE IS A RULER

But, in order for the Bible to perform this function, we must have a working knowledge of what's in the Bible, and we must follow it.

In the Old Testament, God's people often neglected God's law. They did not trust the promises of God, and they did not read God's Word.

In time their worship was tainted by the adoption of pagan practices.

Their politics became even more self-serving and unjust. Moral decay and exile was the result.

If we do not continue to read and reflect upon God's Word, the same thing can happen to God's people today.

This is why the Bible is important.

The Bible is like a ruler.

It measures what we do over against the ideal pattern given to us in God's Word.

How does our life measure up?

We will fall short of the ideal of course.

But, reviewing the basics of Christian discipleship as found in Scripture help us improve.

I like to play golf, and when my game goes south (which alas happens too much), I review the basics. I make sure my grip, stance and ball position are where they need to be.

This usually helps me improve.

The same is true when it comes to Scripture.

Reviewing the basics of faith helps us become better disciples of Jesus.

Where have our lives slipped out of alignment with God's plan?

The Bible gives that answer.

GOD-BREATHED

In verses 16 and 17 of our lesson for today we read that "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work."

Scripture is inspired by God.

Literally that verse says that Scripture is God-breathed. It's not as though Scripture or the human authors of Scripture were breathed into by God.

Scripture was breathed out by God.

Scripture is God's creation.

Scripture is God's Word.

In this regard, Scripture is not just an inspiring set of stories. Scripture is the story. As the Confession of 1967 put it, "The Scriptures are not a witness among others, but the witness without parallel."

In other words, as disciples of Christ, we do not get to decide what is inspiring and right. Scripture does.

We do not define God's Word.

God's Word defines us.

ALLOWS US TO SEE MORE CLEARLY

When we read Scripture our faults are pointed out, and we are taught how to live in a way that is in harmony with God's ways.

The point of this teaching is not to make us miserable. The point is to help us grow up, to become mature in the faith.

We are enabled to do good works because we learn what is good and right through our study of the Bible.

All of us need to do a better job of evaluating our lives through the lens of Scripture.

I think John Calvin once said that Scripture is like a pair of spectacles which allow us to see our world more clearly.

But, many of us refuse to wear glasses even though we know that we need them. (You know who you are!)

In the same way, our first impulse is not to ask, "What does the Bible say?"

Our first impulse is to ask,

"What do I believe?"

What do I want to do in this situation?"

Often, we don't want to be taught or corrected. Correction can be a painful process, but in the long run correction can help us live more gracefully.

The writer of Hebrews said,
 "Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

In other words, this divine word is like a surgeon's scalpel. It cuts to the chase. It points out and helps us eliminate those things in our life that need to go.

In this regard the Bible is hard to read. Most of us don't like to have our shortcomings pointed out. And the Bible is especially good at doing that.

We want to see ourselves in a positive light.
 We want things to go our way.

FAITHFUL PREACHING

But, Paul tells Timothy (and us) to look at the world in a different way. We look at the world in light of the second coming.

God in Christ is coming again to judge the living and the dead.

So in light of the kingdom that comes, we must persevere and be persistent in our preaching of the gospel. We do not alter the message of the Bible make it more palatable.

We simply proclaim the gospel in good times and bad.

Sometimes people will hear the Word gladly and be changed. And sometimes people will reject God's Word.

But, success is not measured by popularity.
 Success is measured by our faithfulness to the Word of God.

The important thing for Timothy (and for us) is to preach the Word of God without regard to the tenor of the times. This takes patience and faith.

When Paul wrote his letter to Timothy, things were not going so well, to put it mildly.
 He was in prison, and many of his friends had deserted him.

His prison was dank and dark.
He was cold and alone.

He asked Timothy to come as soon as possible, at least before winter and bring the cloak that he left in Troas with a man named Carpus.

When Paul wrote this letter, churches were leaving the faith. Other churches were racked with heresy, significant distortions of the faith.

Some leaders in the church were openly opposing the gospel.

And yet what does Paul say?

He said that during this discouraging time he has had an opportunity to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, and the Lord has been with him every step of the way.

He said, "I know that in the end the Lord will rescue me and take me into his heavenly kingdom."

SOUND DOCTRINE

Sometimes in our journey it will seem like the charlatans have the upper hand. Paul predicts a time when people will "not put up with sound doctrine."

That happened in Paul's day, and it is happening in our day as well.

We use that word doctrine a lot in the church, but some may not know what it means.

Doctrine simply means teaching.

And sound doctrine is teaching that is in line with the message of the Bible.

When we say that all Scripture is inspired by God, that means we can't pick and choose passages from Scripture to suit our particular way of thinking. We have to develop doctrine that takes into account the whole Bible.

Liberal and conservative Christians both have been guilty of ignoring the "sound doctrine" principle.

We tend to gravitate around those passages that reinforce what we already believe, and ignore those passages that challenge us.

Paul put it this way. We have "itching ears" and we find teachers that will suit our "own desires."

It is very difficult to avoid this.

There is the natural tendency to affiliate with groups that reinforce what we already believe.

But, as Christians we have to always be reforming our faith according to the Word of God.

Scripture is designed to challenge us.

It teaches us. It rebukes us. It corrects us.

But, in order for that to happen we have to listen to the Bible, the whole Bible.

And after we do that our actions must be transformed by what we hear.

LISTENING TO THE WHOLE BIBLE

All of us have a hard time listening to the whole Bible.

Some of us focus on the letters of Paul.

Some of us focus on the gospels.

A few of us focus on the message of the prophets or the story of the creation and the Exodus.

And lets be honest, a lot of us just don't make time for Bible study at all. We have to figure out a way to correct that.

This passage teaches us that "all Scripture is God-breathed."

Now I must admit that some parts of the Bible are very demanding and require much study. We must study the text itself and good commentaries as well.

(Let me insert a commercial message here. We have a wonderful library, especially our commentary section.)

So, let's put that library to work!

I would challenge you to read a book in the Bible that you have not read before, or have not read as much. And as you read and study that book ask yourself these questions,

"How does this book fit in to the whole story of the Bible? How does this book change what I believe?"

How should I change in response to this message?"

BEGINNING TO STUDY THE BIBLE

I know that some of you live action packed lives where such in depth study of the Scripture is not possible right now. Or maybe you don't feel confident in your ability to study the Scripture.

I have another suggestion.

Take some time to slowly work through the Bible study that I put in the e-letter each week.

Print it out. Answer the questions.

Underline important words and repeated words in the Scripture.

Ask questions of the text.

What does this mean?

Why is this in the Bible?

No question is off limits!

And then bring that Bible study sheet to worship on Sunday morning.

Continue to make notes or ask questions of the text.

If there is one verse that speaks to you, memorize it or write it down and use it to guide your prayer life the next week.

NOT BLOWN ABOUT

It is very important that all of us take up this challenge to develop sound doctrine. Why? Because if we do not develop sound doctrine, we will as Paul put it, "turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths."

Christians who do not know the Scripture or have a distorted view of Scripture will be like a boat that has become detached from its mooring. We will be that boat. We will be adrift. And when the storm comes, we will be in real trouble.

As Paul put it in his letter to the Ephesians, we will be "tossed to and fro, and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming." (Ephesians 4:14)

Every day the Christian faith is badly misrepresented in the media. There are people who attempt to use the Christian faith for political advantage. There are people who attack a distorted vision of the Christian faith.

In order for the Christian faith to survive in a pluralistic world, we need to know who we are and whose we are. We need to know doctrine, the basics of the Christian faith.

THE CREEDS AND BIBLE STUDY

Fortunately we don't have to reinvent the wheel. Believe it or not, you too have enough knowledge to be an evangelist for the Christian faith right now.

If someone asks you what Christians believe, you have the answer. Each week we say the Apostle's Creed.

Well, you can use the Creed as an outline of what the Bible teaches and what you believe. If you can repeat the Creed in your own words, you can proclaim the gospel.

And you can use the Creed to learn another way of studying the Bible, a word study.

There's a book in the library called a concordance. The concordance lists all the times a particular word is used in the Bible.

Another helpful tool is a Bible dictionary. It explains when and how a word is used in the Bible.

With these two books you could look up key words in the Creed and find out what the Bible has to say.

For example, you could look up "creator" or "Jesus" or "Lord" and you would find Scripture references and articles that would help you flesh out your understanding of the Creed and what the Bible teaches on these topics.

DEEP SEA DIVING

Jerome described the Bible as a lake, where one may stay on the surface or choose to explore the infinite depths of truth contained within it.

I think God has called us to go deep sea diving!

In some ways the Bible is more like an instruction manual than a novel. You have to give it a try in order to appreciate the message.

I invite you to give God's word a try this week.

You can find this sermon on our church's website, preskiss.com

Try some of the specific suggestions that I've made.

Let us know how it's going.

Let us know can we help you in your study of God's Word.

I would love to hear about the discoveries you have made and the challenges you have faced as you have read God's Word.

It is my greatest desire that the words of the Psalmist will be true for us, that God's word will be a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. (Psalm 119:105)

That Word will teach us how to live.

Amen.