

The Power of Scripture

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During our last Sunday morning lesson, we looked at the ways that God has chosen to instruct mankind in His will, and we concluded that today, apostles and spiritual gifts have passed on, and God only speaks to us through His written word. Anyone who claims to have some new revelation from God beyond that is either mistaken or lying.

However, that only raises another question. When we have the Bible, what is it that we have? What can we expect the Scripture to do for us? Many people in the religious world have a very limited view of what the written word is able to do. They point to all of the confusion of denominations and churches that exist today and say that the reason for the confusion is that people have taken the Bible for their authority. From this, they reason that the average layperson is not equipped to study the Bible for himself. Instead, we need a class of clergy to study the Bible for us, combine it with various church traditions supposedly handed down from the apostles, and from this, tell us what we need to do.

There are several problems with this argument. First, whenever we see religious division in the world around us, the source of that division is never the Bible. The Bible does not contradict itself, so any church that teaches only the Bible is going to agree with every other church that teaches only the Bible. Religious conflict only appears when people go beyond the Bible and teach as doctrine the commandments of men. Human wisdom is the source of spiritual strife.

Second, the word of God does not need to be supplemented by the traditions of men. Never, throughout the whole New Testament, do we see even a hint of the idea that there is some authoritative religious group today whose teachings we must follow. Never do we see even a hint of the idea that the written word is inadequate. Instead, the Bible explicitly claims that it can accomplish every spiritual work. Let's look at this as we study the power of Scripture.

Basic Purposes.

One of the most important things that the Scripture claims to be able to do is to **TEACH CERTAIN TRUTH**. Look at Luke 1:3-4. Luke, of course, was not an eyewitness. As he says here, his writing was based on a careful investigation of different sources that told about Jesus. With the help of the Holy Spirit, he was able to sort through these sources, sift out truth from falsehood, and present the life of Jesus in chronological order. The result is that all of his readers, from Theophilus to us today, are able to learn for certain about who Jesus was and what He did.

Here's why this is important: there are certainly religious groups out there who claim to base their practice on unwritten traditions that have been handed down since the time of Jesus. If that was good enough, if oral traditions could preserve this certain truth about our Lord, why did God have Luke investigate and write everything down? The reason is that oral traditions aren't fixed and certain. Even today, we know that as we tell stories to one another, the details change, and once a story gets repeated enough, it becomes unrecognizable. By contrast, once Luke wrote everything down, that process of change stopped. The book of Luke hasn't been altered in 2000 years, so it maintains the truth that the early Christians knew about Jesus for us. We can have enough confidence in its record that we can base our lives around it.

In addition to that, the word also claims to **PRESERVE APOSTOLIC TEACHING**. Look at Peter's thoughts in 2 Peter 1:13-15. As Peter himself says, he has two concerns. First, he wants to remind his brethren about the things he'd taught them already. Second, he wants to make sure that even after he's gone, they'll be able to call his teachings to mind. Here, we need to pay special attention both to what Peter did do and what he didn't do. Nowhere in this text, or in any other, do we ever see Peter saying, "I need to appoint some kind of successor for myself and endow him with my gifts and authority so that he can teach and lead like I did." Instead, Peter's concerns were what led him to write 2 Peter. Inside the three chapters of that epistle, we have the written record of what Peter wanted to remind the early Christians about. We have his inspired teaching that continues to be true even though Peter himself passed on two millennia ago. In this, we see the wisdom of God in having His word written down. Though dead, Peter still speaks.

The word was also written down to **INSPIRE BELIEF**. This is the purpose that the apostle John claims for himself in John 20:30-31. Notice that John describes his goal in very different ways than Luke did. John is not interested in arranging the deeds of Jesus in chronological order. In fact, the gospel of John is not chronological. John is not interested in providing a comprehensive account. He says plainly that he left things out.

Instead, John writes to accomplish a twofold purpose. He aims to tell people enough about Jesus that they will believe in Him, and then, once they believe, they can have eternal life through Him. This leads us to one of two conclusions. Either John and the Holy Spirit are idiots, and they failed to produce a gospel that the honest heart would believe, or they succeeded, and the gospel of John is indeed able to inspire the faith that leads to eternal life. Obviously, God didn't fail. John does what it is supposed to. If one book of the Bible alone is enough to generate such a powerful effect, how much more will all the books of the Bible, taken together, make us into disciples of Jesus and safely guide us to heaven? The Bible by itself is sufficient to give eternal life, and once we see that, friends, we should be afraid of

anything more. It can't lead us to a better reward than the word can, and it might cause us to forfeit the reward we can gain by following only the word. If we want to believe in Jesus and go to heaven, we only need the Scripture.

Intermediate Purposes.

For those who have already become disciples, the Scripture is also able to **AWAKEN ZEAL**. Jude claims this for his purpose in Jude 3. Apparently, Jude's readership is facing some serious trouble with false teachers, and Jude fears for them. He wanted to write to them about the salvation of Jesus, but instead, he needed to take a moment to encourage them to fight for the whole system of belief that they had been given. There wasn't anything further that God was going to reveal, either to them or to people after them. Instead, the faith had been handed down once and for all. It was up to them to take a stand for the truth and against the false doctrine that had persuaded even some brethren. Today, we often face similar problems. There are many people who want either to distort the Scripture or to add to its message. Thankfully, just as the written word equipped the early church to defend itself from the enemies of truth, the word equips us today and inspires us to take a stand for the gospel. We need fear no falsehood when we have the Bible.

In quieter times, the Scripture is able to **GIVE UNDERSTANDING**. This is apparent from a passage we've already looked at recently, Ephesians 3:4. Paul, of course, was one of the pillars of the early church, a truly great man of God. The Lord chose him to bring the gospel to the Gentiles, and inspired him with the spiritual understanding he needed to carry out this monumental task. Few indeed are the men who were ever granted such a high level of insight into the will of God. And yet, as impressive as Paul was, as wise as he was in the things of the spirit, he tells us here that when we read his writing, we can understand what he understood. He put his insights down in writing so that the Ephesians, along with anyone else who ever read them, could grasp his meaning and share his knowledge. This priceless treasure is what every one of us has today in our Bibles. We can gain the insight of the greatest men of faith.

Similarly, the Bible is competent to **ASSURE FAITH**. Once again, this is something that we learn about from the pen of the apostle John in 1 John 5:13. John's purpose in writing here is not to create new disciples. It is to build up those who have already heard and obeyed the gospel. The problem that he's addressing is a familiar one to us today. Maybe we're not assembling with the saints as frequently as we should. Maybe some other teaching we've run into has us questioning our commitment to Christ. Maybe life has just got us down. We know from the Scripture that all of these challenges were common in the first century too. John saw these problems developing in brethren he loved, and in response, he wrote 1 John, to reaffirm to his readers that believing in Jesus was the right choice, and that if they stayed true to Him, they could be certain of gaining eternal life. The word still has this power today to bless us in our spiritual crises. I haven't been a preacher for very long, and there's a lot I have to learn, but I know this for sure: whenever a Christian is struggling, more than anything else, he needs to get back to God's book. No matter what our problem is, the Bible has the words of spiritual wisdom that can solve it, and the more we turn to it, the more it will help us on to heaven.

Ultimate Purposes.

Beyond the individual, the Scripture also tells us all we need to know to **ORDER THE CHURCH**. Let's consider 1 Timothy 3:15. As with every author of Scripture, Paul had a reason for writing here. He knew that the church in Ephesus needed help in dealing with church problems: how to appoint church leaders, how to fight off false teachers, how men and women should behave in the church, and so on. He sent Timothy on ahead to help, but he really wanted to be there to teach about these problems himself. However, he knew that other things might keep him from being there.

His response to the difficulty? He wrote 1 Timothy. Even if Paul couldn't be there personally, because of the letter, Timothy now had Paul's wisdom. He could appoint qualified overseers and deacons. He could deal properly with widows. On the basis of Paul's writing, Timothy could address every problem the Ephesian church had. Today, we have many of the same problems. We need to know who should lead in the church. We need to know what the roles of men and women in the church are. Thankfully, the Bible tells us what we need to know. When we put 1 Timothy together with the rest of the Scripture, we learn how the church is to be organized, what its purposes are, and how it is to use its resources. If we want to have the church that is the pillar and support of the truth, we can learn how from the word.

Finally, the word of God is able to **EQUIP FOR EVERY GOOD WORK**. We learn this from one of the most comprehensive claims that the Scripture makes for itself, in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. This passage tells us first that the Bible is useful for teaching, and it tells us what the result will be for us if we apply ourselves to that teaching. We will be complete and fully equipped for every good work. In other words, if there is some good work that God wants us to do, He tells us about it in the Bible. The flip side of the coin is that if there is some work that does not appear in Scripture, it is not a work that God considers good. Thus, if we faithfully do everything that the Bible instructs us to do, we can be certain that we are doing everything that God wants. However, if we leave some part of Scripture undone, or we do things the Scripture doesn't command, we will displease Him and suffer accordingly. If we want to go to heaven, we need the word and the word alone. Our search for divine truth must begin and end between the covers of the Bible.