WHY YOU NEED THE BIBLE

2 Timothy 3:16-17

By

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November 29, 1992

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November 29, 1992
The Basics About the Bible (1)

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Walk into any bookstore and you will find a number of books purporting to tell you how to invest your money so as to get rich. Investing your money in these books makes the authors rich. But there are two questions you must ask about such books: First, is it reliable? Can I trust what the author is saying? Second, is it useful for me? The problem with most investment books is that they assume you have a big wad just waiting to be invested. That doesn’t help me. I need a book that speaks to me where I’m at. If you can show me a book that is proven to be reliable and useful, I’ll buy it and read it. So would you. Maybe.

The fact is, we all own a book which tells us how to invest our lives for maximum profit. This book has been proven to be totally reliable. No one has ever followed its life-investment strategy and been disappointed. And, the book is useful to every human being, right where they’re at. And yet, strangely, it sits neglected on our shelves while we read newspapers and watch television.

I’m talking, of course, about the Bible. It is a book that is totally reliable and useful for every person, not only in this country, but around the globe, no matter what their situation in life. It has never let anybody down. Millions down through the centuries have followed its life-investment strategy and found it to be completely satisfying regardless of the trials they have encountered. Most of us own several copies in different translations.

But the Bible is not a good luck charm. Having a copy in a prominent place in the house will not rub off on a family. Like any book, the Bible will profit you only if you read it, study it, and apply it to your life. I want to sell you on the proposition that ...

You need the Bible because it is totally reliable and useful for all of life.

The problem is, most of you already subscribe to that proposition in theory. But I want you to go away so convinced of it that
you will read, study, memorize, and meditate upon the Bible and apply it on a regular, on-going basis.

In 2 Timothy 3, Paul has been describing to Timothy the difficult times of the last days (3:1-9). He is addressing the question, How can a Christian survive and prosper in such an evil age? In 3:16-17, he reminds Timothy of the reliability and profitability of the Scriptures. Timothy already knew that. So do you. But we need it burned into our hearts so that we will apply it.

1. You need the Bible because it is totally reliable.

“All Scripture is God-breathed” (the best translation). This means that God is the originator of Scripture. Since it comes from God who is reliable, all Scripture is reliable. Next week I’ll elaborate on this, so I’m not going to be thorough today. But I want to touch on two questions:


In our text, Paul was referring to the entire Old Testament and probably would include the New Testament books which had been written up to the time he wrote, including his own writings. Paul directed that his letters be read in the churches (Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27). Several times he claimed that his writings had divine authority (1 Cor. 2:13; 7:10, 12; 14:37; 2 Cor. 2:17; 13:3). The only New Testament books written after 2 Timothy were 2 Peter, Hebrews, Jude, and John’s writings. While I cannot go into the matter of how these books were recognized as authoritative Scripture (“canonical”), they have generally been so regarded by Christians since the fourth century.

I agree with J. C. Ryle, who stated (Practical Religion [James Clarke], p. 71):

... the Book itself is the best witness of its own inspiration. It is utterly inexplicable and unaccountable in any other point of view. It is the greatest standing miracle in the world. He that
dares to say the Bible is not inspired, let him give a reasonable account of it, if he can. Let him explain the peculiar nature and character of the Book in a way that will satisfy any man of common sense. The burden of proof seems to my mind to lie on him.

A second question concerns the meaning of “inspired.” The Greek word means, “breathed out by God” and points to God’s initiative and influence as the source of Scripture. Carl Henry defines it as, “that supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit whereby the sacred writers were divinely supervised in their production of Scripture, being restrained from error and guided in the choice of words they used, consistently with their disparate personalities and stylistic peculiarities” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary [Zondervan], ed. by Frank Gaebelein, 1:25). Or, as Charles Hodge put it, “Inspiration was an influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of certain select men which rendered them the organs of God for the infallible communication of His mind and will. They were in such a sense the organs of God that what they said God said” (Systematic Theology [abridged ed., Baker], p. 77).

Thus the Scriptures find their origin in God. They are not the product of human religious genius. They are not great ideas of which God somehow approved. Rather they are the words of God imparted without error through the various personalities and styles of human authors. God originated the Scriptures.

The bottom line of this is that the Scriptures are as reliable as God is. If God is the God of truth and if the Scriptures are “breathed out” or originated by God, then it is inconceivable that they would contain falsehood or errors. This does not mean that every sentence in the Bible is true: The Bible truthfully records the lies and falsehood of its subjects at times. So you cannot lift any statement from any part of the Bible out of context and claim that it is true (e.g., parts of Job, Ecclesiastes, etc.). But taken in its proper contextual setting, the Bible is an accurate and true record of the very words which God wished to record through the various human authors. It is totally reliable. More on this next week.

Of course the Bible has always had its critics who seek to undermine its reliability. The Bible confronts sinners with their sin. Rather than face their sin, it’s more convenient to attack the Bible.
But I agree with John MacArthur (Our Sufficiency in Christ [Word], p. 117) when he points out that overt attacks on the Bible are not the worst kind. Rather, the most dangerous attack is the subtle undermining which comes from those who say they believe in the Bible, but who deny its sufficiency for all of life. They say that the Bible is all right for dealing with “spiritual” problems (whatever that means!), but they turn to the wisdom of the world to deal with the tough problems of modern life, as if the Bible did not have God’s answers for living in our modern culture. But as Paul goes on to show, the Bible is not only totally reliable. Also,

2. You need the Bible because it is useful for all of life.

Can you imagine God going to all the trouble to save us and then saying, “You’re on your own. Look to the world and maybe you’ll figure out how to solve life’s tough problems!” There is no area of life in which the Bible does not provide God’s wisdom, either directly through explicit teaching or indirectly through principles which apply. In 3:16 Paul shows how Scripture is useful and in 3:17 he shows the result of such usefulness.

A. How Scripture is useful: teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (3:16).

(1) Scripture is useful for teaching God’s truth.

God’s Word is the ultimate and final source and standard of truth (Ps. 119:160; John 17:17). The Bible conveys to us the mind of God concerning the great questions of human existence: Who are we? Why are we on this planet? Is there a God and what is He like? How can we know Him? Why is there death and suffering? What lies beyond the grave? What does the future hold? How do I know right from wrong? These and many other questions are answered from God’s all-knowing and authoritative perspective in the Bible.

Furthermore there are principles and precepts in the Bible concerning all the practical matters we grapple with daily: How do I relate to my mate? How do I relate to others? How do I raise my children? How do I manage my money? How do I conduct my business? How do I make wise decisions? How should I think? How do I control my emotions, such as anger, depression, anxiety,
and impulsiveness? How do I overcome temptation? The Bible speaks practically on these and many more matters.

The Bible is like an instruction manual you get when you buy a new computer. The manufacturer explains to you how to operate the equipment for maximum results. It would be foolish to spend a lot of money on a new computer and then ignore or, even worse, violate the manufacturer’s instructions. God created people. The Bible is His instruction manual on how to live for best results.

The fact that the Bible is profitable for teaching implies, of course, that it is necessary to study it. God chose to communicate His truth in written form. One of the great tragedies of American Christianity is that the species of pastor-theologian is almost extinct. We have forgotten that the greatest theologians of the past--Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Owen, and Edwards--were pastors. Today pastors flock to church growth seminars that give proven techniques for increasing church attendance and managing a growing church. Theology? It’s an interesting hobby for a few quaint pastors, but not very relevant to the work of the modern pastorate.

As a result, pastors are burning out in record numbers and God’s people are starving for the true spiritual nourishment of the great doctrines of God’s Word. What we desperately need is to know the living God and to know ourselves as revealed in His Word of truth.

To do this you must expose yourself to Scripture from every source so that you can grasp its principles and understand how to apply it to life. Obviously it is not a one-page instruction sheet. You don’t catch it by reading a few favorite texts now and then. You need to hear it taught by faithful expositors. You need to read it over and over yourself so that you can compare Scripture with Scripture and have the balance of the whole counsel of God. You need to study it in more depth. You need to memorize portions. And you need to meditate--chew on, think over--all of what you hear, read, study, and memorize.

(2) Scripture is useful for confronting us with our sin.

“Reproof” means to convince or expose. In juristic Greek, the verb form of this word means not merely to reply to, but to refute an opponent. It meant that a lawyer convinced the judge and jury
as to the specific wrongs of his opponent’s case. This means that the Bible has the power to expose sin in our lives and to convince us that we are in the wrong. (We need convincing because we all tend to justify our sin and blame others.) If you are not using the Bible to confront your own sin, then you are not growing in righteousness as God would have you do.

There was once a little boy who loved his mother’s strawberry jam. She put it on the top shelf and told him not to get into it while she ran some errands. He resisted for a while, but finally he succumbed. He put the chair by the counter, climbed up and could just reach his finger into the jam. He enjoyed his illicit treat until he heard his mother coming. He quickly climbed down and was standing there looking innocent when she walked in.

His mother said “John, have you been in the strawberry jam?” He looked her right in the eye and said, “No.” She repeated, “John have you been in the jam?” His eyes fell down to her belt-line, and he said, “No.” A third time she asked, and this time his eyes fell to her shoes, but he still said, “No.” She asked a fourth time, “John have you been in the jam?” This time his eyes fell even lower, so low that he looked right in the middle of his shirt and saw a spot of strawberry jam.

That’s how the repeated reading of the Word works on us, to bring us to apply it to ourselves. The first time through we say, “This stuff really applies to that no-good neighbor of mine. I wish he’d read it!” The second time through we say, “This is good stuff for those obnoxious people at church.” The third time we say, “I wish my wife and kids would read this! It would really improve our family life.” The fourth time we see the spot on our own shirt and say, “Oh, Lord, I need to deal with my own sin!” The Word reproves us.

(3) Scripture is useful for correction.

The Word doesn’t just point out where we’re wrong and leave us there. It also tells us how to get right with God, with others, and with ourselves. It helps restore us to the proper path of God’s ways. When we become aware of sin in our lives, it tells us how to confess it and appropriate God’s forgiveness. It tells us how to be reconciled with those we have wronged. It tells us how to over-
come harmful habits, how to break off harmful alliances, how to mend broken family relationships.

(4) Scripture is useful for training in righteousness.

Once we’re back on the path, the Bible tells us how to stay there and to make further progress. “Training” means, literally, “child-training.” This implies a process where God teaches us how to deal with all of life. Just as a father and mother work with their children over the years to train them in various social graces, morals, and relational skills, so God, through His Word, trains us in all areas of life so that we can know what pleases Him.

No matter where you’re at, a babe or a mature saint, the Scriptures are useful in your life. But the final result is not so that we might go buzzing happily along on the path of life. Paul shows us ...

B. The result of Scripture’s usefulness: Maturity and service (3:17).

(1) Using the Scripture will result in maturity.

“That the man [or, woman] of God may be adequate.” The word means whole or complete, sound of body and mind, full-grown, especially something fitted for its intended purpose (R. C. Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament [Eerdmans], p. 77). Since God made you for His purpose, only His Word—not this world’s wisdom—is able to fit you for that purpose. The Bible will enable you to form a Christian world-view, so that you think and respond to all of life as God intends. There is no such thing as a mature man or woman of God apart from the Word of God. But maturity is not an end in itself.

(2) Using the Scripture will result in service.

“Equipped for every good work.” “Equipped” means to be furnished or supplied. You will have adequate resources to minister to others. It’s not mere theory—you have proven through experience in the crucible of life the truth of the commandments and principles of Scripture. That gives you the resources to impart that truth to others. And you can minister with confidence, because you aren’t imparting your own ideas about life, but rather the very
words of God which have been applied in your life and proven reliable.

Conclusion

It is my prayer and aim that each person in this church would become a mature man or woman of God through knowing experientially the Word of God. I want each of you to know the great doctrines of the faith as a means of knowing the living God and of knowing your own heart. Each of us needs to let the Word confront our own selfishness, pride, anger, lust, greed, and abusive speech. We need to let the Word corrects us and keep us on the path of righteous living in this wicked world. Then we can use the Word as God has used it in our lives to minister Christ to others.

The late Bible teacher, H. A. Ironside, told of visiting a godly Irishman, Andrew Frazer, who had come to California to recover from tuberculosis. The old man could barely speak because his lungs were almost gone. But he opened his worn Bible and, until his strength was gone, he simply, sweetly opened up truth after truth in a way that Ironside had never heard before. Before he knew it, Ironside had tears running down his cheeks and he asked Frazer, “Where did you get all these things? Could you tell me where I could find a book that would open them up to me? Did you learn these things in some seminary or college?”

Frazer answered, “My dear young man, I learned these things on my knees on the mud floor of a little sod cottage in the north of Ireland. There with my Bible open before me, I used to kneel for hours at a time, and ask the Spirit of God to reveal Christ to my soul and to open the Word to my heart. He taught me more on my knees on that mud floor than I ever could have learned in all the seminaries or colleges in the world.” (H. A. Ironside, In the Heavens [Loizeaux Brothers], pp. 86-87).

You need the Bible! It is the only reliable book which tells you how to invest your life. It is useful and sufficient for all of life. I exhort you to begin today to consistently read, study, memorize, and meditate on the Bible.

If you do not know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, the Scriptures are “able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (3:15). Read the Gospel of
John and ask God to impart His gift of eternal life to you. Jesus promises (John 6:37), “The one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.”

Discussion Questions

1. Respond to the statement: “Doctrine is boring and irrelevant.”

2. What is the hardest thing for you about consistent Bible reading/study?

3. What would you say to a guy who defended his lack of Bible reading by saying, “I’m just not a reader”? 

4. If the Bible is sufficient for dealing with our problems, is there a proper place for psychology?

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