

“That You May Know...” What’s the Message? Part One

2 Timothy 3:10 ESV You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, **11** my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. **12** Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, **13** while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. **14** But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it **15** and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **16** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **17** that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

- I. I used to have a friend who, through some very difficult circumstances, was constantly in need of some therapeutic counsel. He had been used, abused, and confused his entire life.
 - A. Thankfully, though, at some point in his life had come to faith in Jesus. You would think that this would have made a decisive difference, but his confusion about life, however, did not end when he became a follower of Christ.
 - B. That was because in his desperate search for truth, he would bounce back and forth between churches of every imaginable flavor trying to find answers to the questions about life and about God, about salvation and holiness, and attempting to find out **exactly** what it was that God required of him.
 1. His relentless searching and comparing of competing messages only produced in him more questions and provided very few (if any) answers.
 - a) Have you ever felt this way?
 - b) Have you felt that in spite of your confidence that Jesus is THE Way, the path of what He requires is not clearly marked.
 2. My friend, restless from the differing messages with which he was bombarded, concluded that you could make the Bible say anything you wanted it to say.
 - C. If I were to ask you if you agreed with his conclusion what would you say? Do you believe that truth is discernible from the Bible? Is the teaching of the Bible predominantly “black and white”, or is it a convoluted mass of varying “shades of gray”?
 1. if you conclude that Biblical truth is more black and white, how do you balance the scales between the different doctrinal positions that a variety of teachers espouse and churches embrace?
 - a) Is there a single unifying truth to be found in scripture that tells us who God is, what he has done, why it matters, who we are, and what we must do?
 - b) Or is it every man and woman (or every church) for themselves? Has a very “vague God” left us to grope in the dark for a truth that will help us to truly know and understand him and give our lives meaning?

- c) Is it just a matter of playing “Russian Roulette” by flipping through and sticking your finger in the book and finding something that works for you (or is true for you)?
 - 2. On the other side of the coin, if Biblical truth is a matter of varying shades of gray, how can you ever have confidence that that you have discovered something that is real; something that can serve as an anchor for your soul?
- D. The good news is that you can **know** what the Bible is saying. It is not so much left up to my perspective, as it is the strength of my discovery of a number of unifying interpretational principles, which are actually given to us in the scriptures that we are attempting to understand.
 - 1. The scripture has several places where where we are encouraged to seek to know truth, but it is also replete with instances where we are assured that we we can know truth.
 - 2. **Ephesians 1:15 ESV** For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, **16** I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, **17** that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, **18** having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, **that you may know** what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, **19** and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might **20** that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, **21** far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.
 - a) Before we engage God’s word, we should always pray that we would have “the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of (our) hearts enlightened, that (we) may **know...**” (not guess or assume but KNOW!)
 - (1) “what is the **hope** to which he has called (us)...”
 - (2) “what are the **riches** of his glorious inheritance in the saints”
 - (3) “what is the **immeasurable greatness of his power** toward us who believe”
 - b) These three goals of our “knowing” are all rooted in Christ Jesus and His supreme Lordship! “...according to the working of his great might **that he worked in Christ** when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, **far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.**”
 - 3. **1 John 5:13 ESV** I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God **that you may know** that you have eternal life.
- E. Today we are beginning a new series called, “What’s the message?”. In this series, Pastor David and I are going to be tackling several “case studies” of scriptures, that are often misinterpreted; or Christian cliches that according to scripture are untrue.

1. Our hope is that we will learn together some basic principles and truths of Biblical interpretation that will help us understand the true message of scripture.
 2. The goal of this series will be three-fold:
 - a) That your confidence in the central truth of the Gospel will be established or reinforced.
 - b) That things that you have believed that are proven to be misguided or insufficient would be abandoned for truth that is Biblically sound.
 - c) That you will be equipped with better tools to understand and interpret the Bible accurately.
- II. Some caveats before we begin:
- A. To say that the Bible is “understandable” and “knowable” does not mean that there are no mysteries beyond our reach, or that we can have conclusive resolution to every single question that we might have.
1. For example, neither I nor anyone else can provide to everyone’s satisfaction every detail of how the end of time will unfold or the exact details concerning the return of Christ. But we know confidently that he is returning!
 2. There will always be some mystery surrounding details of Old Testament history such as the Flood and the Exodus. But we know confidently that there was a Flood and an Exodus because we trust that every word of scripture is true!
 3. What we can know for certain is what the central message of scripture is, and that every word is authoritative and directly inspired by God Himself.
 - a) Truthfully, if we were to have perfect understanding concerning every finite point of scripture, we would be equal to God, knowing the beginning from the ending. And none of us have arrived there, I can assure you.
 - b) **Romans 11:34 ESV** “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”
 - c) **Isaiah 55:9 ESV** For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
- B. We also will not come to a point where the entire body of Christ agrees on every fine point of faith and practice.
1. This becomes a distinction of what has been called “essential” vs. “non-essential” doctrine.
 2. Essential doctrines are things we **must** agree upon. Things like the fact that the Bible is 100% true and is God’s inspired word, that Jesus was both fully human and fully God. That he was born of a virgin. That he represents the only way to be saved, etc.
 3. Non-essential doctrines are those matters of belief in which Christians can still have some liberty to disagree. It doesn’t mean that there isn’t a “right” answer, but just that the possibility exists that we or others haven’t found it yet; and that someone’s disagreement doesn’t necessarily mean that they have departed from sound, essential doctrine, or are not, in fact, believers.
 - a) Just because something is “non-essential” doesn’t mean it’s not important. We may have deeply held beliefs on any of the doctrines in this category.

- b) What is imperative is that we never disassociate from another believer because of differences in these areas.
 - 4. We may never see the day when the entire church (or even this one) fully agrees about the mode of Baptism, the proper operation of the gifts of the Spirit, or what the roles are appropriate for men and women in the church.
 - 5. But we should fully expect and insist that accurate, biblical belief about the character of God, Jesus' person and ministry, and the authority of scripture (among other things) be faithfully presented and adhered to.
 - a) Any departure from the essential category must be met with humble but firm correction.
 - b) Disagreement within the "non-essential" category requires no such rebuke and correction, but we should never shy away from lively (yet loving) debate or gentle encouragement to consider a different perspective.
- III. In preparation for our series to begin, let's consider some important factors in properly interpreting scripture. Remember what we read in 2 Timothy earlier about scripture? **2 Timothy 3:16 ESV** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **17** that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
 - A. First, Paul tells us that all scripture is "breathed out by God". This is from the Greek root "pneo" which means "to breath, or blow". It is descriptive of wind.
 - 1. We see a picture of what this verse is trying to describe in **Genesis 2:7 ESV** then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.
 - 2. Just as God breathed into (or inspired; literally "in-spirited") the man in the Garden of Eden and made him alive, so has he done with his word.
 - 3. **Hebrews 4:12a ESV** For the word of God is *living* and active...
 - 4. Therefore the Bible is like no other religious text or book. Within it's words are the very life of God.
 - 5. **John 6:63 ESV** It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. ***The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.***
 - B. Next we see that the Bible accomplishes several purposes. It is profitable for:
 - 1. Teaching. The Bible is the Christian's primary source for information about God and His will for ourselves and our lives.
 - 2. Reproof.
 - a) The Greek word here means the means of testing or proving something.
 - b) This means that all claims (whether of culture, science, etc.) are subject to the scrutiny of God's Word, and not the other way around.
 - 3. Correction.
 - a) This refers to restoration to an upright state or correction or improvement to one's life or character.
 - b) We must never use scripture as a tool to justify ourselves, but rather as God's means to shine his light on our sin, error, pride and falsehood.
 - 4. Training in righteousness.
 - a) This is the Greek word "Paideia". It is a great word. It can have multiple meanings from the teaching and instruction of children, to the care and

nurture of the body, to whatever cultivates the soul, especially by correcting mistakes and curbing sinful passions.

- b) This is important because it shows that scripture is not limited to some lofty, ethereal, spiritual concepts, but that it is God's provision for the re-creation of the whole person; body, soul and spirit.
- C. Lastly we see the two fold goal of scripture; that the man or woman of God may be "complete" and that they may be "equipped for every good work".
 - 1. "Complete" Some translations will use the word perfect, which will often lead to confusion, leading us to believe that somehow we can be free of fault or imperfection in this life. But the Greek shows us a different picture.
 - a) "Artios" means "fitted".
 - b) The image is of someone who wants to climb Mount Everest, so they first visit an outfitter and get the right kind of coat, ropes, tools, tents and other equipment necessary to successfully navigate the climb.
 - c) The Word of God is your "outfitter" to successfully navigate life in this world. Without the preparation it provides, you're in for a nasty fall!
 - 2. "Equipped for every good work"
 - a) Has anyone ever seen the episode of Seinfeld where George goes to a job interview and just as he is about to find out if he is hired, the boss gets interrupted mid-sentence to take a phone call? George leaves the office and the boss goes on vacation.
 - (1) In true George Costanza fashion, he decides to just show up for the job anyway, even though neither he nor anyone else are sure whether he actually works there.
 - (2) When he arrives he is given the "Penske file", but not knowing exactly what he was hired for, or if he was hired, he spends the entire week, 8 hours a day, filing and refiling the Penske file.
 - (3) Eventually, as always happens to poor George, he is exposed as a fraud and fired.
 - (4) Because he just "showed up", he was never trained or equipped to do "good work".
 - b) I believe that many Christians simply "show up" everyday. But since they have never discovered what they were chosen for, and how to accomplish their task, they are never equipped to do good work.
 - (1) They may try to accomplish important things, but without direction from the "head office" and he "boss", they are doomed to failure from the beginning.
 - (2) So they merely file and refile, repeating the same ineffective methods over and over again.
 - c) God's word, rightly understood and properly understood will prepare us for the work of the Kingdom that results from a life of belief.
 - d) **2 Timothy 2:15 ESV** Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, ***rightly handling the word of truth.***

IV. So what is the basic guideline as we begin over the next few weeks to learn how to "rightly handle the word of truth."

- A. First and foremost, we must never forget that the Bible is ALL ABOUT GOD.
 - 1. Sometimes when we say that it seems like it should be a given, but I assure you it's not.
 - a) If you listen to the way people approach and apply scripture, usually they are looking for information about themselves.
 - b) What is my identity? What must I do to please God? How can I be blessed?
 - 2. But listen to how the scripture begins and ends...
 - a) **Genesis 1:1 ESV *In the beginning, God*** created the heavens and the earth.
 - b) **Revelation 22:20 ESV** He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. ***Come, Lord Jesus!*** **21** The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.
 - 3. Scripture is literally bookended by the message of how God reigned even before you ever showed up, and how he will continue to rule long after our time on earth is done!
- B. So many people approach God through his word asking the wrong questions. And what is always the result of asking wrong questions? We get the wrong answers!
 - 1. They ask "Who am I?" and "What should I do?" But this is because of a self-conscious focus on ourselves, and no one was ever made new by obsessing over themselves, but by gazing on Jesus!
 - a) **2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV** And we all, with unveiled face, ***beholding the glory of the Lord***, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
 - b) We see this in the story of the bronze serpent on the pole that represented Christ, as well the story of Peter walking to Jesus on the water.
 - c) It is when we look to Christ that we are healed and live! It is when we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus that we are kept from "sinking"!
 - 2. Our goal over the next several weeks will be to determine what the right questions are, and to look to the testimony of God's word for the right answers. And we'll know that we are seeing the right answers when we begin to see Jesus in his word. Are you ready?
- V. There is nothing more important than knowing rightly who God is. And you cannot know who God is if you don't discover who he is through his word. Therefore, it is critical that you handle and interpret God's word correctly.