

All About the Bible

by

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All About the Bible

1 - The Bible`s Authority

The world today is crying out for an authoritative voice. The need is for a clear voice which will direct and guide us through life. Many people lead a purposeless life going from one idea to another with no sense of direction and fulfillment. There remains that inner void that the ideologies of the world cannot fill. We need a reliable voice, a trustworthy voice. Where can such a voice be found? Some may argue that we can appeal to our own feelings and intuition for direction. But our feelings are often fickle and changing. We sometimes can't be sure we have got it together ourselves! Others say we can appeal to our reason. But what is the criterion to determine that my reason is better than the reason of someone else that sees things differently? We end up with a pool of thoughts. Some might say a pool of joint ignorance! What about the creeds and confessions of the Church. Well, we are getting a little closer here. But we need to determine what these creeds are based upon before we decide to adopt them. Maybe we should look to Christian experience as the source of authority. That is all right as long as we remember that subjective experience must be built on solid objective truth. This begs the age old question, "What is truth?" Can absolute truth be found in a postmodern world on which we can build meaningful experience? The answer is *yes!*

That authoritative voice is the Holy Bible. The source of absolute truth is to be found there. It is there that we find the authoritative voice of God. The Bible calls us to listen to its words, and to find the value that there is in living them out. God says in Proverbs chapter 1 verses 1 to 6, "My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding". Wisdom and understanding are found by applying ourselves to the study of God's word. It includes living out that word in our lives. This means that the benefit of listening to God is to live life to the full. It means knowing the right things to do and to say. It brings a good grasp of what life is all about and where it's heading. It gives you direction and help to live well.

The result is blessing on a life that has decided to choose Gods way and follow him. Obedience to God's word is the source of happiness and real contentment.

So, ultimate authority belongs to the living God. Dr. Robert Lightner puts it like this, "All authority ultimately rests with God, but because of his transcendence he has mediated his authority to man in the Scriptures of the Old Testament.

The authority of Scripture rests firmly upon the authority of God and possesses all the authority he possesses since it came from him". This authority also extends to the New Testament.

Since God made us he knows what we need to be fulfilled here on earth. He has revealed himself and his purposes in the Bible. He took the initiative when he revealed himself to us.

This means that if God exists and is real, which he is, then it's in our best interests to submit to his authority over our lives.

God has not been silent. He is a God who communicates. If God created you and me then we should not be surprised if he communicates himself to us. He did this in creation. He did it in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The subjects of creation and Jesus Christ as sources of divine revelation are something we will look at again in the coming programme. He is certainly revealed himself in the Bible. We will look at reasons why we believe that the Bible is the word of God later on in this series. For the moment we focus on the nature of the Bible. We read in 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16, "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness". The Bible is from God the source of all authority. He caused it to be written. If it were not for the Bible we would know nothing about God. It is a mine of information on matters of eternal consequence. To live under his authority is to be really free. It is also a guide through life as it speaks with authority on every aspect of life. The Bible is always relevant because the eternal God speaks through it to finite men. The needs we have never change. The Bible addresses those needs. This is why we need the Bible. It speaks with relevance to all generations. It speaks with authority to us today. Our world desperately needs positive, clear direction on family life, marriage, relationships, work, morals and ethics. We read in 2 Peter 1:3, "Gods divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness". Peter also challenges us in

2 Peter 1 verse 19, "As we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts". This fallen sinful world is indeed a dark place. Men and women stumble about in it trying to find the right way. It seems to elude them. God's word points the way in the darkness just like a torch on a dark night lightens your pathway. Our creator has spoken. Make sure you listen. When you do, you will say with David in Psalm 119 verse 105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path". I commend to you the study of the Bible. Search the scriptures. Investigate its pages. It will revolutionize your life, and be a firm foundation as you face the various challenges of life.

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2 - The Necessity of Revelation

The message of the Bible is that God has revealed himself. The word `revealed` translates a Hebrew word meaning “to make naked”. David said in 2 Samuel 7 verse 27,

“O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, you have *revealed* this to your servant”, or, “you have made this naked”. In other words revelation is exposing truth, bringing it out into open view and making it known. The Greek word translated revealed means “making known religious realities”. It is found in Jesus` prayer in Luke 10 verse 21, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and *revealed* them to little children”. The Bible teaches that God has condescended to make himself known to men and women through the self-disclosure of himself. This is vital for two main reasons.

Firstly, God is in heaven and we are men and women on earth. We are his creatures. David said in Psalm 100, “Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his”. The difference between us and God is that God is eternal we are finite. He eternally exists and he created us. He is self-supporting but we are dependent on him for all things. We read in Psalm 145 verse 15, “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time”. If God had not revealed himself to us, we would never have known him. We would have had no idea about his character. We would have known nothing of his plans and purposes. We are dependent on him revealing himself so that we can know him. God in his grace has made himself known to his creatures. God knows himself thoroughly. We know ourselves as self-conscious beings. Without his revelation to our hearts and minds we cannot know God. Without that self-revelation we would still be in the dark.

Secondly, mankind is the victim of the fall. Sin has entered the world. We read about this in Genesis chapter three. Man chose to disobey God and go his own way. This brought separation between God and Man. This meant that man was severely rendered incapacitated. He was plunged into darkness within his own mind and understanding. Paul reminds the believers in Ephesus of their previous fallen condition before they became Christians.

We read his description of this in Ephesians 2 verses 1 to 3. He says, “And as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature the objects of wrath”.

It is only as we fully realise the impact of our separation from God that we realise that without divine intervention we would continue in darkness and sin. Paul further elaborates on this. He says in Ephesians 4 verses 17 and 18, “So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They

are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance of their hearts". This is your condition if you are not a Christian who is born again of God's Spirit. The sinful nature you have been born with has debilitated your mind and heart. We read in 1 Corinthians 2 verse 14, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned". Sin has created a barrier between you and God. Sin has brought spiritual blindness. Sin has affected your perception of reality in God's world. So God must take the initiative of making himself known. Without that move on God's part you would never have sought after him yourself. Man cannot find God through his own wisdom. We read in 1 Corinthians 1 verse 21, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe". We need revelation because of the invasion and impact of sin in our lives.

Since we will not come to God left to our own inclinations, God must come to us. Scripture testifies to this. We read in 1 John 4 verse 10, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins". Here then is the motive for God's self-revelation. He did it because he loves us. He saw a world lost in sin. He saw the effect of sin in man's heart, mind and will.

As our creator he made us to have a relationship with him. That relationship is broken. But he made a way to restore us to himself. He revealed the depths of his love to us by sending his Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross as the Lamb of God bearing away my sin and your sin. Jesus is the great theme of the Bible from the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation.

For anyone to know God he must come and enlighten the mind and understanding. It is through revelation that God has made himself known. Revelation is indispensable. The great news is that he has revealed himself and it is possible to know him. I trust you know him as your Saviour and friend. The Bible is designed to point the way to Jesus Christ. The Bible reveals God's character, mercy and love in his dealings with mankind.

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3 - God Revealed

God is a God who communicates. He has not hidden himself away in a dark corner. He is knowable. It would be understandable then for God to reveal his presence in a variety of ways. The Bible is one important way He has done this. There are other ways too. God's revelation of himself may be divided into two categories. The first is general revelation. This means that God has revealed himself in Creation.

Mankind has no real reason to deny God's existence because the created world around us declares it. It is as though God is waving and saying "Hello"! The Bible says in Romans 1: 20, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse". How do we account for the variety, colour, splendour and glory of all that we can see around us? The whole of creation speaks of an intelligent architect. It is no surprise that people hide behind theories like evolution which argues that the world evolved from some grand explosion and primeval slime. Evolutionists really hope this is true because it removes all sense of accountability to a creator God. God is the true origin of species. The scripture is clear on this. We read in Psalm 19: 1, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands". Creation has design which suggests a designer, and colour suggests an artist. The DNA code implies a code giver with intelligence. The laws of nature means a lawgiver was involved. As someone rightly said, "God has left his fingerprints all over the universe". That the world has an intelligent creator satisfies all logic and reason. The law of cause and effect is all around us. The house you live in just did not appear from nothing. It was designed and built. To say it wasn't would be illogical and unreasonable. Yet Atheists want us to ditch logic and reason when it comes to the origin of the world. Something never comes from nothing. Creation is the work of the master architect, God himself.

There's a second aspect to general revelation. Immanuel Kant once said, "Two things strike me with awe: the starry heavens above and the moral law within".

This moral law within is the second testimony to God's existence. It is the work of conscience. We all have one. What is it?

John Calvin put it well when he said, "Distinction between virtuous and vicious actions has been engraved by the Lord on the heart of every man".

The Bible says in Romans 2: 14 – 15, "Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not know God's moral law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their conscience bearing also witness, and their thoughts now accusing now even defending them". The conscience is a sensitive piece of internal equipment. It can be damaged by taking in wrong information, and silenced by constantly turning a deaf ear to it. Make sure that you handle it with care. Scripture tells us that the Jews had the law in their possession given by God in the form of the Ten Commandments.

The intriguing fact is that non-Jews, or Gentiles, who didn't possess the Ten Commandments on two stone slabs clearly had them inscribed on their hearts. Human morality throughout the world reflects the moral requirements of the Ten Commandments. Somehow people everywhere recoil against murder, thieving, lying, and they feel guilty when they do wrong. Now this should be no surprise to us because we are all created in the image of God. The moral law is a reflection of God's perfect character and standards for mankind. God says, "You shall not steal". Why do you feel guilty if you do steal? There is that nagging accusing voice inside that is telling you what you did was wrong. This is evidence of a higher moral being to whom you are accountable and whose image we bear. This is evidence of God's existence who wrote these very laws on your heart. Your conscience is simply reminding you of this! Why do you feel good when you do the right thing? Conscience is commending you because in this case you have conformed to the moral law given by your creator. R C H. Lenski made this point, "Conscience holds us accountable to God. Drop the idea of God and the vitality of conscience is destroyed. Ideas of right and wrong do not bind the conscience; the idea of God and judgement does". The accusing aspect of the work of the conscience reminds you of the predicament you're in without Jesus Christ as your Saviour. Sin is breaking God's law. We have all done this. So, we are all sinners. Conscience gives us that sense of guilt when we have sinned. Our sin needs to be forgiven by the one we have offended, namely, God himself. God has made provision for this in Jesus Christ's death on the cross.

The wages of sin is death, but Jesus the sinless one bore our sins in his own body on the cross. He died in our place bearing the punishment due to us. Repentance and faith in him delivers us from sin and an accusing conscience.

The limitations of creation and conscience are that neither categorically proves the existence of God, nor can either of them save us from sin and guilt. They are pointers to the feasibility of God's existence, and they argue logically in favour of his existence. They are evidence that the concept of a moral supreme creator God is reasonable. They both reveal man's accountability, and the need of forgiveness for our sin and rebellion. Since the entrance of sin into the world through Adam's disobedience man has never found God by studying creation. Also, He has often silenced and perverted the voice of conscience, and brought himself into a condition where the conscience has become numb. General revelation is inadequate of itself to bring men to God and salvation. A more complete revelation is needed.

There is value in general revelation. It reveals God's goodness to us. The moral law of God, expressed in the Ten Commandments, has provided a firm basis for moral government in many societies in the world. It is held evil back and promoted good amongst men. It is provided orderly government, and helped us to differentiate right from wrong.

General revelation shows that God is there. He is there whether man recognises it or not. Man needs to see this and acknowledge that God is there.

General revelation reinforces man's accountability. The Bible indicates the purpose of general revelation when it says in Acts 17: 26 – 28, "From one man he made every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole earth, and he determined the times set for them and the exact place where they should live. *God did this so that men would seek him and*

perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each of us. For in him we live and move and have our being”.

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4 - Special Revelation

Last time we looked at the subject of general revelation where God reveals himself through creation and conscience. But this is like the starry sky to the full midday sun. A fuller revelation is needed for us to know God. There is such a revelation and it's known as special revelation. There are two aspects to special revelation. First, God has revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ. This is known as the incarnation when God became man and lived on earth. We read about this in Philippians 2: 5 to 8:

“Christ Jesus...who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross”.

God was present in Jesus Christ and we see the character of God in him. His divine glory was hidden behind his servant-hood as man. Occasionally it would shine out such as the time when with a word he calmed the raging storm on lake Galilee. Jesus said in John 14:9, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father”. The divine attributes that belong to God the Father also belong to the incarnate Son of God Jesus Christ. If you want to know what God is like then look at Jesus. Study his life as found in the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The second aspect of special revelation is the Bible. God has left us a book which communicates his words to mankind. The self-testimony of the Bible is that it is God's word. We read in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”. Some have argued that to say the Bible is God's word because the Bible says it is becomes circular reasoning. But the Bible is self-authenticating. We know it *is* God's word because it has proved itself to be in the lives of those who trust its promises and live out its principles. The Bible works in daily life! The promises of mere men often fail. A Key evidence for the divine authorship of Scripture is that it never fails those who put faith in it and obey it.

Some would say that there is a third form of special revelation. It is the communication of the gospel by Christian believers. We read in Romans 10:14, “How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” There is an inseparable link between what God has revealed in Jesus, and in the Bible, and those who make it known to others. This would involve all kinds of witness from preaching to talking to family and friends about the gospel. The essential thing is that the word of God is proclaimed. Anything less does not communicate the revelation God has given.

Now, its needs to be clear that this isn't on the same level as the revelation found in Jesus Christ and the Bible, but it is the method God uses to make known his revelation to people in society. The witness of Christians links the truth of the Bible to their own generation. Its focus is the cross of Jesus and his death and resurrection. We read in Acts 8:4, “Those who

had been scattered preached the word wherever they went". There we see revelation made known through proclamation.

The first two aspects of special revelation are complimentary to each other and must be held together. Christ is the living word. He is known through the written word, the Bible. The written word is designed to introduce you to the living word, Jesus Christ. You can know about Jesus through the Bible, but information is not enough. Mere facts won't bring you into a relationship with God. It is even possible to treat the Bible in such a way that you become guilty of Bibliolatry where you are virtually worshipping the Bible rather than the God it points to. The Bible reveals God and his salvation but to enjoy this salvation you must enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The initial response to the Bible by men and women is unbelief. There is a resistance to its message. Special revelation by itself is unable to bring a true knowledge of God. By this I mean an experiential knowledge of God, knowing God in the heart. This is not because there is a lack of power in the Bible, but because of the nature of mankind. Men and women are fallen. Sin has ruined them and robbed them of true knowledge of God. The Bible must not only inform, it must transform.

The Bible has done its work when it reveals the Lord Jesus Christ as the answer to your spiritual need and has led you to repentance and faith in him. We read in 1 Peter 1:23, "For you have been born again not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living word of God". The word of God is the instrument used by the Holy Spirit to bring life to the soul. How does he do this? The Holy Spirit works through the Bible to bring conviction of sin. The Holy Spirit troubles your heart; he exposes your lost condition. He makes the good news of the gospel effective by opening your eyes to its wonderful message and the provision of a Saviour. He brings us to faith. He brings us to new life in Christ. We read in Titus 3:5, "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit". Jesus said in John 15:3, "You are already clean through the word I have spoken to you". Revelation must redeem as well as teach. Can you see how important it is to take the Bible seriously as the word of God and believe its message? Its message teaches your need of Jesus. It provides the steps to salvation as it points the way to him. The Holy Spirit opens up the understanding and breaks down barriers standing in the way of belief. As a result of his work the believer receives true revelation to his or her own mind and soul. The revelation contained in the Bible becomes real in the heart. Only then can it be said that you have a true knowledge of the Lord.

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5 - Reasons to Believe the Bible is God's Word

If we believe that God exists then it is logical to assume that he would want to communicate with his creation. We have looked at ways in which God has done this. He has revealed himself in Creation, Conscience, Jesus Christ and in the Bible. I want to look more closely now at the revelation of God in the Bible. That God should want to communicate with us is a great act of condescension, especially when you consider the mess man has made of his world. But he has come down to our level and spoken in words we can understand. There are good reasons to accept that the Bible is God's word. When the Prophets of the Old Testament spoke they prefaced their message with the words, "The Lord says". For example in Isaiah 3:16 we read, "*The Lord says, 'the women of Zion are haughty'*". Or, the Prophet will say that he has received a word from God. We read in Ezekiel 6:1, "The word of the Lord came to me". Someone might argue that anyone could claim God has spoken to them. How can we be sure they are God's words and not the Prophets'? Well, the warnings of future judgements, and the predictions of future events, given by the Prophets actually happened. For example, around five hundred years before the event, the prophet Micah said that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. We read in Micah 5:2, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah though you are small among the clans of Judah out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel whose origins are of old".

Anyone who believes that the Bible is the word of God is in good company. Christians follow Jesus both in his example and in his teaching and views. This is good reason to accept that the Bible is God's word because Jesus himself did. Jesus used the Old Testament. He quoted from it regularly. His use of the Old Testament is very insightful. He believed in its divine character. Jesus said to the Jews in John 10:34-35, "Is it not written in your law, 'I have said you are gods'? If he called them 'gods' *to whom the word of God came*, and the Scripture cannot be broken, what about the one whom the Father set apart". He believed in its divine inspiration. He said in Mark 12:36, "David himself *speaking by the Holy Spirit said ...*". Jesus believed in the history of the Old Testament. He accepted that people like Jonah, Noah and Abraham did exist. He said in Luke 17:26, "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man". Clearly for Jesus, Noah's days were part of actual history. Again he said this about Jonah in Luke 11:30, "For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to his generation".

Jesus held to the abiding ethics of the Old Testament. Jesus was asked a question by the Pharisees about the lawfulness of divorce. He said in Matthew 19:3-6, "Have not you read" he replied "That at the beginning the Creator made them male and female", and for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate". Jesus quoted with approval from Genesis 2:24 in the Old Testament. The divine ideal is the commitment of a man and woman to each other in the marriage relationship.

Jesus appealed to the Old Testament to support his own mission. We read in Luke 24:27, “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself”.

Jesus rebuked those who did not accept the Scriptures as God’s word and did not allow it to shape their views. He said in Matthew 15:3, “Why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?” Tradition is always subservient to Scripture or rejected when it contradicts it, and for Jesus Scripture clearly contained direct commands from God. How can we possibly have a lesser view of the Bible than Jesus? You might ask the question, “Well you have said the Old Testament is the word of God but what about the New Testament? Is this also the word of God?” Jesus anticipated this question. He left us in no doubt that the New Testament was equally the word of God. He said in John 16:13, “When he the Spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all truth”. This predicts the inspiration of the New Testament. When the Apostles began their writing, the Holy Spirit reminded them of Jesus words. Their writing was accepted as Scripture. Peter says this about Paul’s letters in 2 Peter 3:15-16, “Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him....his letters contain some things hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, *as they do the other Scriptures*”. It’s clear that from an early date the writings of the Apostles were placed on equal level to the Old Testament Scriptures.

In the same way the Apostles believed that the Bible is God’s word. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is the fulfillment of God’s word. Peter said in Acts 2:16, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel”. Joel prophesied some hundreds of years before the events on the day of Pentecost. The events happened because God had predicted them. Because the Scripture is God’s word then the events will take place. God’s word cannot fail. The Apostles referred to the Old Testament to show they were fulfilled in the life and mission of Jesus Christ. The coming of the Saviour promised in the Old Testament is the great theme of their preaching and writing.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, “For what I received I passed on to you of first importance, that Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*, that he was buried, and he was raised on the third day *according to the Scriptures*”. The Old Testament was clearly held to be Scripture and thereby the very word of God. The Apostle Peter confirms his position about the character of the Old Testament. In Acts 4:25 Peter prays and he quotes from Psalm 2 and says to the Lord, “You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant David: why do the heathen rage?” Again, in 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 21 he says concerning the Old Testament, “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”. The Apostle Paul was of the same conviction. He said in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”.

The evidence is clear that both Jesus and the Apostles accepted the Old Testament as God’s word. There’s no reason why you shouldn’t accept it.

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6 - The Inspiration of the Bible

The Bible is God's word to mankind. It contains his self-revelation so we can know what he is like and what he requires of us. It is the truth of inspiration that gives the Bible its authority. God speaks as we read its pages. What do we mean when we speak of inspiration? By inspiration we mean that work of the Holy Spirit where he moves the writers so what they write is God's words to mankind. He does this whilst at the same time preserving the human writers' personality, mode of expression and vocabulary.

There are two key verses of Scripture that reveal how this is done. The first is 2 Timothy 3:16. We read, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching". In historical context this verse speaks of the Old Testament. It might be more accurate to speak about expiration then inspiration. The word breathes out from God in the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is all his work. The breath of God refers to the Spirit of God. It's used often as a metaphor in the Old Testament of God's action. We read in Psalm 33:6, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth". Just as the breath of God created the world so it formed the Bible. So the Bible is of divine origin. The word "All" suggests that every part of the Bible is the result of divine inspiration. This includes narrative portions of Scripture, the poetic books, the history and the wisdom literature. All these literary forms were included and all were inspired.

The next verse of Scripture that throws light on the nature of inspiration is 2 Peter 1:21. We read, "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit". The Bible was never man's idea. How could man ever conceive of the holy and righteous God discovered in the pages of Scripture, a God who is so contrary to man's own nature. How could he begin to imagine such a God full of glory and majesty with a mind so darkened by self and sin? So Scripture didn't have its source in the minds and will of men. It did not arise out of a man's own reflections. They "spoke from God". As they wrote they communicated what God wanted to have written down. The words "carried along" translate a Greek word that describes the motion of a ship driven along by the wind. Human authors were employed in the writing of Scripture, but the initiative, leading and inspiring was from God himself who "drove them along" with the wind of his breath.

There have been a number of attempts to explain how God worked with men in the production of the Bible. Some hold to the dictation view which holds that the writers of Scripture were no more than human keyboards. But the Bible says in 2 Peter 1:21, "*Men spoke ...*". Jesus said in Mark 7:6, "*Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites*". Luke gives the reason for writing his gospel. He says in Luke 1:3, "it seemed good also *to me* to write an orderly account". Clearly divine inspiration didn't override human freedom of expression.

Another explanation is the accommodation view. Some scholars say that the Bible is full of errors. But this is all right, they say, because God simply chose to accommodate himself to the limitations of the writers. Faults are inevitable. This contradicts the Bible's own view of

its origin when it says that men were “carried along by the Holy Spirit”. God ensured the accuracy of his own word through human authorship.

The most satisfactory view is that of God’s providential control in the process of inspiration. God supervised everything relating to the writing of the Bible including the writers’ background, circumstances, and character. Whenever they wrote down events they saw or were involved in, their thoughts on a given theme, poems, sermons, letters, and observations were the product of the writers in every way, but they were also the very word of God. The writers addressed particular issues and circumstances relevant to them, but at the same time they wrote God’s word to every generation. This is what is meant when we read that the men of God were “carried along”. They each had their own unique personality and character shaped by God in their journey of life, which was then moved on by the Holy Spirit, so the final product of their writing was exactly what God wanted to say.

There are two implications to the divine inspiration of the Bible. Inspiration is both verbal and plenary. Verbal inspiration means that every word is inspired by God not simply the ideas. When Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16 that “*All scripture* is God-breathed” he means every single word is God-breathed not only the ideas behind them. Plenary Inspiration means that all of the scripture in the whole of the Bible in all its parts is inspired. We do not say that the Bible *contains* the word of God, but that the Bible *is* the word of God. When it’s said that the Bible contains the word of God it implies some of it isn’t inspired. No, inspiration is plenary; it encompasses the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

So we see that the Bible is no ordinary book, it is the very word of God to us all.

All About the Bible

7 - The Reliability of the Bible

When you open your Bible and begin to read it, can you be certain that what you are reading is reliable? I believe you can have absolute confidence in the reliability of the Bible.

In our last study we said that the Bible is inspired. Every word of the sixty-six books of the Bible is inspired and every part of those books is inspired. Because of this we must go a step further and say that the Bible is both infallible and inerrant. We cannot arrive at any other conclusion. This is because when Jesus prayed to God the Father in John chapter 17:17 He said, "Sanctify them by your truth; your word is truth". He said in John 10:35, "the Scripture cannot be broken". Jesus had a very high view of Scripture. To him it was God's word of truth. The inspiration of the Bible demands belief in the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible because God is infallible and inerrant. What do we mean by infallibility? Whatever the Bible states in every part is truthful and can be trusted. God's word will never mislead us or misinform us. The Bible is never wrong. We must be clear that the Bible is not only infallible in its spiritual revelations, but on whatever matter it covers. It is also accurate when it refers to historical and geographical facts. Some have argued that the Bible is infallible in its spiritual and moral teaching, but may include mistakes in other areas. They say that the writers saw things through the lenses of their own culture, or they made historical errors, or they had misconceptions about scientific information. This is a dangerous way to approach Scripture because it undermines the Bible as the authoritative word of God. It makes us selective in deciding which parts of the Bible is God's infallible word and which parts might not be. If it is not God's inspired infallible word in entirety, then how can we ever be sure that God is speaking to us in a particular verse or passage we are reading?

We also believe that the Bible is inerrant. If the Bible is the very word of God then it follows that it must be inerrant, that is, without error. It must be without error because God is truth. Whatever the Bible speaks about, whether its doctrine, history, morals, or ethics, it is free of mistakes. All the events in the Bible happened. All the people found in the Bible existed. This includes all the stories of the Bible like Noah and the Ark, and Jonah and the Great Fish. Jesus clearly believed in the history contained in Scripture. He said in Matthew 24:37, "as it was in the days of Noah", and in Matthew 12:40 he said, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish". These are not fictitious bedtime stories but factual incidents in the history of the world.

Strictly speaking, when we speak about infallibility and inerrancy we are referring to the original manuscripts. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament mostly in Greek. We call these the languages of inspiration. Scholars have undertaken a study of the many manuscripts that have come down through the years and confirm that there is very little difference between the originals and their copies. We can be confident that the translations available have been produced with the greatest of care and respect. We must bear in mind that since the Bible is inspired by God he has watched over its transmission and translation so that what we have is a reliable version in our own language.

There are some important implications about inerrancy. We cannot have confidence in the gospel without an inerrant Bible. The view we have about who Jesus was, and what he did, depends on the information we have in the Bible. If the record of Jesus` life in the gospels is nothing more than the ideas of men, then our faith rests on mans speculative thinking and not Gods revealed truth. The life of Jesus, his virgin birth and incarnation, his death and resurrection, the message of salvation, are located in historical circumstances. If these historical events are at best uncertain, and at worst untrue, then we cannot preach with confidence that a unique person, the Son of God, actually came into this world to save sinners like us. Doubt about biblical history throws doubt on the biblical theology behind it. Paul puts it well in when he says in 1Corinthians 15:14, "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith". Our preaching and faith rests in the historical certainty that Jesus died and rose again. A lack of confidence in the Bible leads to a lack of authority in preaching. It also leads to confusion and uncertainty in those who listen. A woman was often seen going to and from church by her neighbour. The neighbour noticed that every time she passed by her Bible was thinner. One day she asked, "Do you use a different size Bible every Sunday? It seems thinner every week!". "Oh no", she replied, "the Minister tells us every Sunday that we don't believe this part and that part of the Bible now, so I just tear the pages out that are no longer of any use".

To argue for a Bible that contains error is a reflection on God himself. It suggests that God has deceived us. It implies that it needed modern scholars to sort the mess out and to determine what God said and what he did not say. No, God has spoken in his word in every page, every line, every word! All we need to know about him, and his purposes in Jesus Christ, is fully declared in scripture, infallibly and without error. The nineteenth century Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon said, "God writes with a pen that never blots, speaks with a tongue that never slips, acts with a hand that never fails".

All About the Bible

8 - The Unity of the Bible

One of the most remarkable things about the Bible is its unity. The staggering thing is that there is such a perfect unity in so much diversity. The Bible contains sixty six books. The Bible is not just one book, it is a collection of many books. There are thirty nine in the Old Testament and twenty seven in the New Testament. This collection of books is called the "Canon" of scripture. The word "Canon" translates the Greek word *kanon* meaning a rule which serves as a measure. When applied to the Bible it refers to the limit of the literature accepted as inspired. The sixty six books fall within the measured boundary of inspiration. The writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit, believers are illuminated by the Holy Spirit, and they were given discernment by the Holy Spirit to recognise which books were truly inspired by God. The litmus test was whether the books were written by the Prophets and Apostles. Any writing that broke the consistency of the message of the Bible was rejected. This is why a book like the gospel of Thomas was rejected. It wasn't consistent with the writings of Paul and other Apostles. It was written by Gnostic heretics and given the title of a famous Apostle to give the writing credibility. Jesus said in John 10:3-4; and 17, "The sheep hear his voice (the voice of the good Shepherd) ... the sheep follow him, for they know his voice". Here Jesus shows that there would be an infallible instinct that would guide the church. This discernment enabled the Church to assemble the correct books to form the complete canon. Each book carried an inherent authority.

The sixty six books display a wonderful harmony. This is remarkable when you consider the background to all of them. The Bible was written over a period of sixteen hundred years by forty different authors. Most of them lived at different times and never met each other. David, who wrote many of the Psalms, lived three hundred years before Isaiah. The authors lived in different places. Some lived in Babylon, others in different parts of Israel. They all came from varied backgrounds. Amos was a Shepherd, David was a King, Isaiah was a statesman, Ezra was a priest, Paul was a scholar, Luke was a doctor, Matthew was a tax collector, and Peter was a fisherman. Yet despite all this variation the message of the Bible is consistent throughout. The central message is God's love for a dying world and the provision of redemption in Jesus Christ. The great theme of the whole Bible is Jesus Christ the promised Saviour of the world. On the resurrection morning Jesus met with two of his disciples. They were on their way home to Emmaus from Jerusalem. They were despondent because they thought that they had lost Jesus forever. Jesus walked with them and taught them from the Old Testament.

This must have been the most wonderful Bible study in history! They'd forgotten that the Bible's main theme was the coming of the redeemer who would suffer and die.

We read in Luke 24:25 to 27, "Jesus said to them, 'how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' 'And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in *all the Scriptures* concerning himself"

The Bible contains unity of doctrine. Man was created by God. We read in Genesis 1:27 in the Old Testament, "So God created man in his own image". The same truth is found in the

gospel of Mark 10:6. We read, "God made them male and female". Mankind is sinful. We read in Psalm 51:5 in the Old Testament, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me". This is echoed in Romans 3:23 in the New Testament. We read, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". Mankind is redeemed by Jesus Christ the promised Messiah and redeemer. We read in Genesis 3:15, where God speaks to the Devil, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers, he will crush your head and you will strike his heel". This is often referred to as the "Pro-Evangelium", that is, the first preaching of the gospel. Here is the first announcement of a deliverer who would deal with man's sin and overthrow Satan. The same theme is picked up in the New Testament. We read in Galatians 4:4-5, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons".

The view that the Bible presents of God is one. Consistently God is portrayed in the same way with the same characteristics. The writers never got it wrong over sixteen hundred years. He is revealed in scripture as sovereign. We read in Daniel 4:35, in the Old Testament, "He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No-one can hold back his hand or say to him; 'what have you done?'". This same truth is found in the New Testament. We read in Romans 9:20-21, "But who are you O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'why did you make me like this?' Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?". He is revealed as a God of love. We read in Deuteronomy 7:8, "It was because the Lord loved you". We read in John first letter chapter 4 verse 10, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins".

How do we account for this unity within the sixty six books of the Bible? There can be only one explanation for this uniform consistency. There is one author. God inspired the writers so that what they wrote was consistent with his own character, and with his plan and purposes for this world. Although the authors are many, the revelation is one.

All About the Bible

9 - The Powerful Word of God

Last time we considered how the unity of the Bible was evidence that it is inspired by God. Another evidence is the power of the Bible to transform the lives of men and women. The Bible is life-changing. The Bible speaks for itself when it changes people's lives. The Bible is self-authenticating. It does what it says it will do. No-one is ever let down when faith and trust are placed in the word of God. Charles Spurgeon, the well-known Baptist preacher, said, "I will defend the Bible in the same way I would defend a Lion. I will open the cage and let it loose".

The Bible is powerful because it is a living book. It is the written word of the living God. God is life. The Bible cannot be a dead thing. Scripture speaks of itself in terms of life. We read in Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active". Jesus said in John 6:63, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life". The spoken words of Jesus are recorded for us in the Bible. This life is communicated to all who believe. The scriptures are inspired by God the Holy Spirit. The Bible carries within it the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. Peter says in 1Peter 1:23, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God". The Bible is the agent of the new birth. This is illustrated in John chapter 11. Jesus visits the town of Bethany where his friend Lazarus has died. He had been dead four days. Jesus tells them to remove the stone from the tomb. He says in John 11:43, "Lazarus, come out!" We read in verse 44, "The dead man came out". The word of Christ's command to a dead body carried within it life giving power. The Bible is the same. Inherent within the words of scripture is the power of God to deliver men and women from spiritual death, and give them new life in Christ. Have you been born again? Has there been a time when you heard the voice of the Son of God and you lived and passed from death to life?

The power of the Bible is seen when it convicts men and women of sin. During the reign of King Josiah in the Old Testament, the Book of the Law was found in the Temple. It was read to the King and it was clear that Israel had not kept the commands found in it. Great conviction of Sin came over the King. In 2 Chronicles chapter 34 verse 19 we read, "When the King heard the words of the law he tore his clothes". In verse 21 he said, "Great is the Lord's anger that is poured out on us because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book".

When God's word speaks to your heart about your sin you will experience this same remorse and seek to put things right between you and God.

The power of the Bible is seen in its sanctifying work. The word "sanctify" means to make holy. It means to become more and more like Jesus. The great aim of our salvation in Christ is to be conformed to Christ. We read in Romans 8:29, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his son". The scripture is God's great instrument in shaping us to be Christ like. Jesus said in John 17:17, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth". In John 15:3 Jesus said, "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you". The difference between the Bible and any other book is that whilst other books inform only the Bible transforms. Jesus wants us to live holy lives that

honour him. We can only do this as we listen to God's word and apply it diligently to our lives. This is part of the process of our preparation for the second coming of Jesus. We read in Ephesians 5:25-26, "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain wrinkle or any other blemish". We will grow in our faith when we let the word of God positively impact our lives.

The power of the Bible is seen when we use it in our spiritual warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil. In Ephesians 6:17 we read, "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God". In his great hymn "A safe stronghold our God is still", Martin Luther wrote in the third verse, "and let the prince of ill look grim as ever he will, he harms us not a whit; for why? His doom is writ; a word shall quickly slay him". Jesus used the word in his wilderness temptations. Whenever the Devil tempted him to act in sinful independency from the Father he said, "It is written". We must follow the example of Jesus. We must read the word of God. We must know it. We must remember it, and, we need to know when and how to use relevant verses as we fight the good fight. We should know God's promises and appeal to them when we face the enemy of our souls.

The power of God's word is seen in its longevity. It has withstood attacks throughout the generations. It's indestructible. There's a reason for this. Jesus promised in Matthew 5:18, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished". The Huguenots were members of the Protestant Reformed Church of France during the 16th and 17th centuries. They suffered great persecution. They produced a picture of the Bible and the Christian faith as an anvil. The anvil was surrounded by Blacksmiths vigorously hammering away. Beneath the picture they wrote this inscription: "The more they pound, the more they shout. The more they wear their hammers out!" The Bible is the word of the eternal God. God is indestructible and so is his word.

All About the Bible

10 - Problem Texts

I wonder if you have ever read your Bible and felt puzzled sometimes. Well, you would be in good company. Peter said this about Paul's writings in 2 Peter 3:16, "he writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other scriptures, to their own destruction". If Peter struggled sometimes with texts of the Bible then we must not feel too bad when we do. Problem texts are those verses in the Bible that are difficult to grasp and reconcile one with the other. There are those who are quite happy to make much of these *apparent* contradictions. They have no love for the Lord or his word. They follow the tactic of the devil whose first trick to deceive man and woman was to question the reliability of the word of God. We read in Genesis 3:2-4, "The woman said to the serpent...God did say `you must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die`. `You will not surely die` the serpent said". Undermining the word of God has been Satan's tactic from that time until the present.

The well-known theologian B B Warfield said, "The Bible difficulties are like phantoms they vanish when anyone attempts to touch them". You need to bear a few basic principles in mind when you study God's word and come across what appear to be discrepancies.

The first principle is to have a panoramic view of the Bible. Some will take a couple of Bible verses randomly and arrive at a faulty conclusion. For example, Genesis 1:31 says, "God saw all that he had made and it was very good". Then reference is made to Genesis 6:6. We read, "The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth and his heart was filled with pain". The criticism is why would God feel that way about man when he said all he made was good? When we read this early history carefully we notice a tragic change that took place with God's relationship to man. In Genesis chapter 3 man disobeyed God and sin entered the world. This brought death and sorrow. Man's rebellion grew worse and this led to God's regret that he had made man. To miss this point will lead to confused thinking.

Another example is that of Cain's wife. The question is asked, "Where did Cain get his wife from?" The reasoning behind this question is that in Genesis chapter 4 Adam and Eve have two sons Cain and Abel. Cain murders Abel and he went to live in the land of Nod. Here he meets his wife. The argument given by those who oppose the reliability of the Bible's history is how this could be if there were only four people living at that time: Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel? But for anyone who studies the Bible carefully we find that there were many more people living on the earth by the time Cain went to the land of Nod. We read in Genesis 5:4, "... Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters".

Clearly by the time Cain and Abel had reached a certain age of maturity there were other children belonging to Adam and Eve living on the earth. Cain married his sister. This was permitted by God at this time in earth's early history. In the time of Moses marriage restrictions between close relatives were introduced because of the increasing deterioration of the human race and the threat of physical complications.

Another principle is the cultural setting of the Bible. Some argue that there is a contradiction between Matthew 8:5 and Luke 7:3. They both record the same event. In Matthew 8:5 we read, "When Jesus had entered Capernaum *a centurion came to him* asking for help". In Luke 7:3 we read, "The centurion heard of Jesus and *sent some elders* of the Jews to him asking him to come and heal his servant". There is a solution to this apparent contradiction. In the culture of Jesus day it was the custom to attribute to the person himself an act that he had directed others to do. This is how Matthew records the event, whilst Luke indicates who the centurion sent on his behalf.

Much is made by the opponents of the Bible about the difference in the time of day relating to the events surrounding Jesus' trial and crucifixion. We read in Mark 15:25, "It was the *third hour* when they crucified him". John tells us in John 19:13-14, "Pilate ... brought Jesus out and sat down on the judges' seat ... it was the day of preparation of Passover week, *about the sixth hour*". The objection is how could Jesus be on trial on the sixth hour of the day, when according to Mark he was on the cross at the third hour of the day? The explanation is straightforward. The Roman day was reckoned from 12 midnight. The sixth hour would be six in the morning. John used the Roman reckoning. The Jewish day was reckoned from 6 a.m. sunrise. The third hour of the day would be nine in the morning. Mark used the Jewish reckoning. So, Jesus was on trial at six in the morning Roman time, and crucified at three in the morning Jewish time.

Another principle when dealing with problem texts is the geography of the Bible. In Luke 18:35 we read, "As Jesus *approached Jericho*, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging". Recording the same event, Mark tells us, in Mark 10:46, "Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, *were leaving the city*, a blind man, Bartimaeus was sitting by the roadside begging".

Did Jesus heal the blind beggar as he approached Jericho or as he left the city? The answer is that there were two sites for Jericho. There were the ruins of the old city that God said should never be rebuilt on that site. There was the new City of Jericho close by. Luke records Jesus approaching the new city of Jericho. Mark refers to Jesus traveling from the old city as he travelled toward the new city.

So we can see that when the Bible is read and studied carefully, bearing in mind the panorama, culture, and geography of the Bible the problem texts are no problem at all. As Warfield said, "They are like phantoms, they vanish".

All About the Bible

11 - Reading the Bible

Every Christian should read the Bible. A daily time in God's word will be a real source of encouragement and challenge. Why should we spend time reading the Bible?

Reading the Bible is the only means for us getting to know what God is like. It tells us what God's will is. The Bible directs us in the right way. We read in Psalm 119:105, "your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path". God's word is life to the soul. Jesus said in John 6:63, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life". The words Jesus spoke are written down for us in the Bible. They bring life to all who obey them. This life is abundant life now and eternal life in the future. The word of God is food to our souls. Jesus said in Matthew 4:4, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God". In other words life cannot be found in the material things of this life. As good and beneficial as bread is it can't reach down into the deep places of your soul and bring lasting pleasure and real joy. This is true of any material thing this world offers.

Reading and doing what his word commands shows that you are his loving disciple. Jesus said in John 8:31, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples". How you respond to God's word when you read it or hear it preached will show a lot about the reality of your claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Reading the Bible moves the heart. In Luke 24:32 we read the testimony of the two disciples who met with the risen Jesus on the Emmaus road. They said, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?" Devotion is kindled in our hearts when the Lord speaks to us in his word. These despondent disciples were revived as the Lord opened up the scriptures. Are you feeling low? Get into the word and let it warm your heart.

Reading God's word shapes the will. David said in Psalm 119:11, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you". The will follows the choices of the heart. When God's word is in your heart, molding and shaping its desires, then the will follows in conformity to it.

Reading the Bible produces Faith. We read in Romans 10:17, "Faith comes through hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ". The Bible speaks about God's greatness, his power and glory, his faithfulness and grace. All of these great truths, when believed and received, strengthen our faith in who God is, and what he will do for all those who trust him. Many times God's people in the Old Testament looked back to great events of divine deliverance. They drew much comfort from them. This practice also built up their faith believing that God could do those things again for his needy people. David said in Psalm 63: 6-7, "On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadows of your wing". David thought back to previous blessings and it helped him to trust in the Lord for any future needs. The writer to the Hebrews did the same thing. He said in Hebrews 13:5-6, "God has said `Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you`. So we say with confidence `The Lord is my helper; I will

not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” His faith was strengthened by remembering God’s promise and applying it to his present circumstances.

Reading the Bible produces hope. In scripture hope isn’t a vague thing. When we use the word hope today there’s an element of uncertainty about it. Hope in the Bible is sure and certain. The Bible gives us hope in present difficulties. We read in Psalm 46:1, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble”. We need not despair in trials because we are assured from our Bible reading that God will be with us to help us. There is hope for the future. We read in Romans 8:20, “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God”. When we read our Bibles we are encouraged because we know that this world isn’t all that there is. There’s a brighter day coming when Christians and this fallen world will be changed when Jesus returns.

Reading the Bible sustains us as we live in this dark and fallen world. We face many challenges, problems and circumstances. Life brings many various trials and temptations. How can we face them? In Acts 27 we read about Paul’s shipwreck. The boat he was travelling in to Rome met a furious storm. In Acts 27:23 Paul said to the crew, “Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you’”. Paul faced the storm and danger with peace and confidence knowing that God had promised to help him and bring him and the crew to safety. It is the same for you and me. We can be confident in the promises of the word of God. Whatever we face we have the promise of the Lord Jesus. He said in Matthew 28:20, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”. If that were the only promise in the Bible it would be enough to know that Jesus remains with us through life’s journey. Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:4, “He has given us his very great and precious promises”. There are many more promises from God scattered throughout the Bible for you to read and hope in when the storms of life come against you.

All About the Bible

12 - Studying the Bible

Reading the Bible daily is important. It is during our own personal reading that God is able to speak to us. It is equally important to make a habit of studying the Bible. As valuable as reading the Bible is, we need to dig deeper. The great truths of the Bible are known through study. Daily reading is good but it often leaves us with a superficial understanding of the passage we have read, even with the best monthly Bible reading notes to help us.

God expects us to do more than read his word. The great truths of the Bible can't be unlocked unless they are prayed over and diligently studied. A preacher once began his sermon by saying, "Christians should never read the book of Leviticus in the Old Testament". You can imagine the perplexed look on the faces of the congregation! Then he clarified himself. "No", he said, "Leviticus should never be read—it should be studied". He had a point. Study and research is needed if you are going to understand the meaning of the various rituals and sacrifices found in that book. The Principal of the Bible college I attended told us that his policy was that whenever he was reading through a book of the Bible, and he came across a verse that was difficult to grasp, he would not go any further until he understood it. He would spend time studying the verse until it opened up its treasures.

Bible truths are revealed as a result of discipline and work. We read in Proverbs 23:23, "Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding". There are four things we all need as we follow the Lord: truth, wisdom, discipline and understanding. They come at a price. No, I do not mean we can buy them with money. This idea of buying the truth suggests at least two things. Whenever you buy anything it is because you want it and you see its value. Many do not study the Bible because they have no desire. When you see the blessing that can be yours by studying it and living it out then you will want to know more about it. Buying speaks of cost. When you buy something you pay for it. There is a cost to getting truth, wisdom, and understanding. When you buy something of great price then there's a financial sacrifice you make to own it. The cost to buying the truth is the effort you put into studying the Bible. This demands your time, concentration, and thought. Sacrifice is needed.

This is the point made in Proverbs 2:1-5. We read, "My son, if you *accept my words* and *store up my commands* within you, *turning your ear to wisdom* and *applying your heart* to understanding, and *if you call out* for insight and *cry aloud* for understanding, and if you *look for it as for silver* and *search for it as for hidden treasure*, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding".

The Lord is more than willing to give us understanding. The problem is our lethargy in seeking it. That passage of scripture shows the effort we should put into Bible study to receive the benefits. We must apply ourselves to Bible study. It involves crying out to God in prayer for light and help as we study his word. If you knew there was treasure to be found at a certain place in a nearby field you would go there and dig and dig until you unearthed it.

The same attitude should be seen in our approach to understanding the Bible. Unearthing the great truths of the Bible should be your top priority above everything else. After all, knowing how to live in a way that pleases God is why we are here.

Mary had the right attitude. Jesus and his disciples visited the home of Mary and Martha in Bethany. Martha was busy in the kitchen preparing the food for her guests. Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to his teaching. Martha was not impressed. We read in Luke 10:40 that Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, do not you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?" Martha was not doing anything wrong, she was doing a legitimate thing. Jesus said to Martha in Luke 10:41, "Martha you are worried and upset about many things. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her". The point is that Mary's priority was right. Learning from Jesus took precedence over the passing things of this life. Material things, however legitimate and important some of them might be, won't last forever. They have no eternal consequences. The best use of your time is to learn from the Lord through his word the Bible. The treasures you discover are eternal and will not be taken from you. The point Jesus is making to Martha is not that she should neglect food and family needs. She simply needed to get them in perspective. There is always the danger of giving more priority to the things of everyday life, and miss out on what really matters like our spiritual growth. If we are honest, we don't give as much time to studying the Bible compared to the time we spend doing other things in life.

Make it your aim to set some time each week to study a book of the Bible until you have a good understanding of it. The Bible speaks about meditating on God's word. This is a lost art for many of us. We read in Psalm 119:97, "Oh, how I love your Law! I meditate on it all day long".

We need to stop and think about what we have read in God's word. Life is moving at a fast pace for most of us. We are often in such a rush. This is the deadly enemy of Christian meditation. William Bridge said, "Man may think on God every day and meditate on God no day". Pray that the Lord will open your eyes to see great things from his word. We have the Holy Spirit living within us who enlightens the minds of all who study the Bible diligently. Ask your Church leader to suggest a good Bible commentary, Concordance, and other Bible helps. These will be invaluable as you study God's word.

You will be rewarded with a good knowledge of the Bible. This will help you to know God's will for your life. It will bring great happiness as you live it out. You will be able to discern between truth and error and not be led astray. Above all you will grow to be like Christ. This is the chief aim of the Bible that you grow in love and obedience to God, and live a holy life pleasing to him.

All About the Bible

13 - Obeying the Bible

During the earlier talks in this series we saw that the Bible is inspired by God. It is his special revelation to us. We read in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is God-breathed". Since the Bible is from God, it is no ordinary book. It requires a response. This is because the Bible tells us what God requires from us. It reveals his will for his people. We must give the response of obedience. God has spoken. His will is revealed. Our responsibility is to do what he asks. This is vital for our spiritual growth, the welfare of the church and the evangelism of the lost. The problem is that often we read God's word and we hear it preached, yet are slow to do what God has said. This is a great weakness. Be careful of being a hearer of God's word, but not a doer of God's word. The word of God mustn't be treated lightly, or with a glib carefree attitude. It must be treated seriously.

There are many exhortations about hearing and doing God's word in scripture. Probably the best known is found at the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. This is found in Matthew's gospel chapters 5 to 7. Jesus covers all sorts of things in this sermon. The famous beatitudes are there, telling us how we can live happy lives as citizens of God's kingdom. There's practical teaching on living in a way that ensures our light shines in a dark world, and how to be salt in society. Jesus gives teaching on murder, adultery, divorce, loving our enemies, giving to the needy, prayer, and how to avoid worry. There's plenty of practical application. But knowing how fickle we can be Jesus finishes his sermon with a story about two men. One builds his house on sand and the other on rock. When the storm comes the house on the sand falls down, and the house on the rock stands firm. Who is the man or woman who has clearly built their house on the rock? Jesus said in Matthew 7:24, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and *puts them into practice* is like the wise man who built his house on the rock". The rock is Jesus Christ and his word. The house is our life. The wise man and woman build their life on Jesus Christ and put into practice what he says.

Another well known passage of scripture dealing with hearing and doing God's word is James chapter 1:22 - 27. In verse 22 James says, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says". The highest form of self-deception is to think you have done all that needs to be done by listening to a sermon. Listening is half the job. We must put God's word into shoe leather! We must put it into practice. James uses the illustration of someone who looks into a mirror and sees his face, and he says in verse 24, "after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like".

The purpose of the Bible is to show us what we're like, "warts and all"! Scripture exposes our sins. It reveals our shortcomings. It tells us what to do about it. The problem is we are often like the man James mentions. We hear God's word; it speaks to our hearts. But we go away and do not give it another thought, when we should be responding to its challenge and applying it to the way we live. The American preacher Warren Wiersbe once said, "Too many Christians mark their Bibles, but their Bibles never mark them". God's word is meant to change us for the better and impact our lifestyle. In Luke 8:18 Jesus said, "Therefore consider carefully how you listen".

Notice Jesus said it is not just listening that's important but how we listen. We can hear but not listen. The words fall on our eardrums, but do not reach our minds and hearts and affect our behavior. James tells us the type of listening that brings blessing. He says in James 1:25, "But the man who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it, he will be blessed in what he does". Blessing is in the doing. The key is to look intently into God's word and to continue doing this. We must allow God's word to do its work. When you hear from God in the Bible, think about what He has said. The way to a Christlike life of fruitfulness is to study the Bible, meditate upon it, and listen to it being explained by the preacher. Then examine your own heart and put into place what God has said to you through his word. Too often we examine the preacher. We give marks out of ten for content and presentation. We sit at home analyzing the sermon presentation rather than letting the sermon analyze us. Worst of all we forget what the sermon was about because once we leave the church the message leaves our minds. This is tragic. A woman came home from Church earlier than usual. A neighbor who met her on the way said, "Is the service finished already?" The woman replied, "the church service has finished, but my service has just begun!" You see the point? She had listened to the sermon, now it was time to live it out as she obediently served the Lord.

The whole point of James' letter is to encourage practical Christianity. The evidence of hearing God's word well is seeing it lived out on a daily basis. He highlights three areas of our lives that should be affected by the Word of God. First is the way we speak. He says in James 1:27, "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless". Second is sympathy. He says, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress". If you see someone in need and you are able to do something to help then do it. Third is separation. James says, "And to keep oneself from being polluted by the world". We will live in daily obedience to the Bible and avoid those polluting influences that it warns us about. The Bible exhorts us to speak in a way that glorifies God, to serve people in a way that glorifies God, and to live our daily lives in a way that glorifies God. This lifestyle proves we are not just hearers of the word, but doers of the word.

There is a day coming when we will give an account to God about how we lived our lives. On that day he won't ask us, "what did you read", he will ask, "what did you do".