

The Abiding Value of God's Word

2 Timothy 3:14-17

When Paul wrote this letter, he reminded Timothy of the great, unlimited, unequalled value of the Scriptures. He told him to “*continue in what you have learned,*” and in saying that to Timothy, Paul uncovered a great principle for discovering the value of God's Word for our lives today. The word “continue” is the same word we see in the Gospel of John, when Jesus tells us to “remain” or “abide” in Him:

*I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man **remains** in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing...If you **remain** in me and my words **remain** in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. (John 15:5-7)*

Paul was telling Timothy, and God's Holy Spirit is telling us, that we are to immerse ourselves in the Word of God. But beyond that, Paul then moves on to tell Timothy why he should immerse himself in the Word of God. Listen again to vv. 16-17, this time from The Living Bible:

The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us to do what is right. It is God's way of making us well prepared at every point, fully equipped to do good to everyone.

In these two verses we discover that God's Word not only has value to us today, but that its value is abiding, eternal, never-ending, never-changing.

1 God's Word shows us what is right, v. 16a

First of all, Paul tells us in verse 16 that God's Word is useful for “teaching.” The primary idea here is that as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we do not automatically know everything there is to know about walking with Him and serving Him. We do not automatically know everything there is to know about God and His relationship with us. The Scriptures should be used to give us sound instruction in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Earlier, Paul had told Timothy, “*If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed*” (1Timothy 4:6). He also told him, “*Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching*” (1 Timothy 4:13).

Paul had written to the Christians in Rome, *“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”*

When Paul wrote the Corinthian church, he gave them instructions on certain questions they had asked of him. Then he said, *“I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a **right** way in undivided devotion to the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 7:35). In Ephesians 6:1, Paul said, *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is **right**.”*

In Philippians 4:8 he wrote, *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is **right**, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”* He told the church at Thessalonica, *“never tire of doing what is right”* (2 Thessalonians 3:13).

James had written, *“If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing **right**”* (James 2:8). First John 2:29 reads, *“If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is **right** has been born of him.”* First John 3:7 reads, *“Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is **right** is righteous, just as he is righteous.”* God's Word shows us what is right.

We have to constantly be on guard against those things which are not right. Fire ants have virtually taken over the southern United States since they were accidentally transported here a few decades ago. They are amazingly adaptable, fiercely aggressive, and multiply seemingly overnight. Worst of all, sprays seems to have little or no effect on them. Scientists finally figured out a way to wipe out an entire colony. Pellets of the ants' favorite food are tainted with a tasteless, odorless poison, and sprinkled around the mound. The worker ants immediately begin gathering up the food and take it down into the heart of the colony, where they unwittingly feed the poisoned pellets to their queen, slowly killing her! When the queen dies, no more workers are produced, so in a couple of weeks the entire colony starves to death.

That is how it is with false doctrine. Those who lack exposure to God's Word to show them what is right lack the ability to discern properly between true and false doctrine, between what is right and wrong. They import it into the heart of the church, thinking it is harmless and even good. In the end, people starve to death spiritually, without even realizing what is happening to them.

A *Peanuts* cartoon once pictured Lucy and Linus looking out the window at a steady

downpour of rain. “Boy,” said Lucy, “look at it rain. What if it floods the whole world?” Linus replied confidently, “It will never do that. In the ninth chapter of Genesis, God promised Noah that would never happen again, and the sign of the promise is the rainbow.” With a relieved smile, Lucy said, “You’ve taken a great load off my mind.” The comic strip closed with Linus saying “Sound theology has a way of doing that!”

God’s Word shows us what is right.

2 God’s Word shows us what is not right, v. 16b

Paul also wrote in verse 16 that God’s Word is useful for what he calls “rebuking,” or in the King James Version, “reproof.” This could be said to be the negative, but necessary, aspect of the Word of God. According to the Bible itself, this rebuking is to be done both privately and publicly.

Jesus told us in Matthew 18:15, *“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his **fault**, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over,”* and the word “*fault*” is the same word that is translated “rebuking” in 2 Timothy 3:16. In a public sense, Paul had written Timothy earlier, *“Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning”* (1 Timothy 5:20).

John the Baptist had rebuked Herod because of his adultery, and the same word is used there in Luke 3:19 to describe what John had told him. Jesus told the church at Laodicea, *“Those whom I love I **rebuke** and discipline. So be earnest, and repent”* (Revelation 3:19).

We are told that there are only two ways to study the Bible. One is to study it with your mind made up, and the other is to study it to let it make up your mind. God’s Word shows us what is not right. But this advantage of the Word of God is available to us only as we take the Word into our lives and make it apply to us personally.

There is a story of a frontier settlement in the West where the main source of income was the lumbering business. The town wanted a church, so they built one and called a minister. The preacher was well-received and liked by everyone.

One day at the river he happened to see some of his church members pulling towards the bank some logs that had been floating downstream to the mill from another village upstream. Each log was marked with the owner’s stamp on one end. But the preacher was appalled to see his members pulling in the logs and sawing off the end where the stamp had been burned in.

The next Sunday he prepared a forceful sermon on the text, “Thou shalt not steal.” At

the close of the service, the people of the church lined up and congratulated him: “Wonderful message, mighty fine preaching.” But the next week, the preacher walked down to the river and saw his church members continuing to steal logs. They liked the sermon, but they had not applied it to themselves personally.

This bothered the preacher a great deal. So he went home and worked on a sermon for the following Sunday. The topic this time was “Thou shalt not cut off the end of thy neighbor’s logs.” When he got through, the people had a quick meeting and ran him out of town!

God’s Word had shown them all along what was not right, but until it was applied to them personally, it would have little value to them at all.

3 **God’s Word shows us how to get right, v. 16c**
Paul also told Timothy that God’s Word is useful for “correcting.” Let’s look at that word a little more closely, because it will reveal to us one of the key functions of the Word of God. The word “correcting” is defined as “to straighten up what is crooked or bent,” or “to raise up what has fallen.”

In Luke 13 we see a woman who approached Jesus one day. This woman had been bent over for eighteen years so that she could not straighten up. The Bible says that Jesus “*put his hands on her, and immediately she **straightened up** and praised God.*” In the 14th chapter of the book of Acts we see Paul coming into the city of Lystra, where there was a man who had been lame from birth and had never walked. Paul called out to him, “*Stand **up** on your feet!*” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. The man was straightened up: his physical body was corrected so that it could function properly.

Another use of the word was “to move in a straight line.” Hebrews 12:13 tells us to “*make level paths for your feet,*” and the idea is that a level path is a straight path. So what Paul is saying to Timothy, and what God’s Word says to us today, is that it enables us to straighten up our lives, to raise up what has fallen in our lives, to provide correction for our lives, to properly align those attitudes, thoughts, and intentions of our hearts with the eternally straight standards of God’s Word.

In fact, Hebrews 4:12 reads, “*For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*” Psalm 119:105 tells us, “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path,*” meaning that all along the pathways of our lives there will be found pitfalls and stones over which we can stumble. Left to ourselves we sometimes wander away from the path. God’s Word acts as the agent of correction to keep us on the path of life and righteousness. God’s Word shows us how to get right.

Years ago in Detroit, Michigan, the well-known evangelist, Dr. Charles Finney, preached on the text, “*The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanseth us from all sin,*” from 1 John 1:7. After the service a stranger asked Dr. Finney to walk home with him. Some of the church officials knew this man, and advised Dr. Finney not to go with him. But he went anyway.

They walked down the street, and the man stopped and unlocked a door, ushering Dr. Finney inside. He then turned and locked the door, put the key in his pocket and said, “Don’t be afraid. I’m not going to hurt you. I just want to ask you a few questions. Do you believe what you preached tonight?” Dr. Finney said, “I certainly do.”

The man responded, “We’re in the back of a saloon. I am the sole proprietor. Mothers come in here, lay their babies on the counter, and beg me not to sell liquor to their husbands. I turn a deaf ear to their cries. We see to it that when a man leaves here he’s well under the influence. More than one night a man leaving here has been killed by the express train at the tracks. Dr. Finney, tell me, can God forgive a man like me?”

Dr. Finney replied, “I have but one authority: the Word of God, which says, “*The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanseth us from all sin.*”

“But that’s not all,” added the man. “In another room we run a gambling hall. If a man doesn’t spend all his money on liquor, we bring him back here and with marked cards see to it that he’s fleeced out of his last dollar. We send him home penniless to a hungry family. Dr. Finney, I’m sole owner of this gambling hall. Tell me honestly, can God forgive a man with a heart like that?” Again Dr. Finney replied, “I have but one authority: the Word of God, which says, “*The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanseth us from all sin.*”

The man spoke again: “That’s not all. Across the street is my home where live my wife and little daughter. Neither one has had a kind word from me for five years. Their bodies bear the marks of my brutal attacks. Dr. Finney, do you think God could forgive a man with a heart like that?”

Dr. Finney’s eyes lowered. His eyes filled with tears as he said, “My friend, you have painted one of the darkest pictures I have ever gazed on, but I still have only one authority which says, “*The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanseth us from all sin.*”

The man then opened the door, escorted the preacher out into the night, then never left the room until the sun was rising—but before it did, he ripped up the decks of cards and poured out all the contents of all the bottles down the drain. Then he crossed the road to

his home, where he sat in his living room quietly.

His little girl stood at the door of the living room and called, “Daddy, Mother says breakfast is ready.” When he answered his little girl kindly, she ran back to her mother, and said, “Daddy spoke kindly to me! Something is the matter!” When the mother followed her little girl into the living room, her husband motioned for them to come closer.

Taking one on each knee, he explained to their amazement how they had a new husband and a new daddy. He ended by saying, “I’m done with that business across the street.” He became a whole-hearted follower of Jesus Christ, joined the very church whose leaders had advised against Dr. Finney going with him, and later became a leader there himself.

When asked to tell how his life was changed, he would reply, “I have only one thing to say: *The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanseth us from all sin.*” God’s Word shows us how to get right.

4 God’s Word shows us how to stay right, v. 16d

Paul continued in verse 16 by saying that God’s Word is useful also for “*training in righteousness.*” The word translated “*training*” appears in the King James Version as “instruction,” and that’s pretty close. It means “education,” but it’s not just a picture of a classroom with a teacher at the front. It could mean “discipline,” or even “chastening.” This training teaches us how to stay right with God.

Paul used the word again when he wrote to Titus:

*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It **teaches** us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:11-13)*

A similar idea is found in Hebrews 13:

*May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the Sheep, **equip** you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (vv. 20-21)*

That word “equip” in Hebrews 13 sheds a great deal of light on the kind of training God works in our lives. It means “perfectly united” (as in 1 Corinthians 1:10) in the sense that two things are “knit together.” When the word is applied to our characters, it means that God works in us a process that enables the various elements of godly character to be

knit together in our lives. Sometimes the process God uses to equip us is pleasant, but sometimes it can be painful.

A woman visiting in Switzerland was out for a walk one day, and came to a sheepfold. She saw the shepherd sitting on the ground with his flock around him. On a pile of straw within an arm's reach lay a single sheep, which appeared to be suffering. As she looked closer, she saw that the sheep's leg was broken. Her sympathy immediately went out to the sheep, so she asked the shepherd how it happened.

The shepherd said sadly, "I broke it myself." But he went on to explain, "Of all the sheep in my flock, this was the most wayward. It would not obey my voice and would not follow when I was leading the flock. On more than one occasion, it wandered to the edge of a perilous cliff. And not only was it disobedient itself, but it was leading other sheep astray. Based on my experience with this kind of sheep, I knew I had no choice, so I broke its leg.

"The next day I took food and it tried to bite me. After leaving it alone for a couple of days, I went back and it not only eagerly took the food, but licked my hand and showed every sign of submission and affection."

The shepherd continued: "When this sheep is well, it will be the model sheep for my entire flock. No sheep will hear my voice so quickly nor follow so closely as this one will. Instead of leading the others astray, it will be an example of devotion and obedience." (*Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, p. 108).

Hebrews 12:11 reads, "*No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*" Sometimes God does have to discipline us, and discipline us severely. He rebukes and corrects us, but it is not just for punishment. It is so that we might learn how to stay right with Him, how to follow Him closely and listen carefully to His voice. Even discipline is "training in righteousness." That training in righteousness shows us how to stay right.

5 God's Word equips us do right, v. 17

In verse 17, Paul told Timothy that God's Word equips the person of God to be ready for anything! His exact words were "*that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"

There are two words in this verse that deserve special attention. The King James Version reads, "That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Modern translations may overlook the word "perfect," but it is there just the same. It

does not mean to be without sin or flaw. It describes something which has been designed or shaped so that it is fit for use. It also means “in fit shape or condition.” The word translated “thoroughly equipped” is similar, but means “furnished for service,” or “to finish out.” It could be used to describe the work of a carpenter, who finishes out a piece of wood. The Word of God finishes out the believer; it furnishes and equips the believer so that he or she can live a life that pleases God, and do the work that God assigns.

You see, the purpose of Bible study is not just so we can understand doctrines, or that we can know where to find a certain Bible verse when we need it. Those things are important, but the ultimate purpose is to equip the believers who read it and apply it to their lives.

Henry Ward Beecher said a long time ago, “The Bible is God’s chart for you to steer by, to keep you from the bottom of the sea, and to show you where the harbor is, and how to reach it without running on rocks or bars.”

God’s Word shows us today what is right, what is not right, how to get right, how to stay right, and equips us to do right.

Is that the kind of value you get from God’s Word in your life?