

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **The Work of the Word, Part 1**

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:15-16a

Code: 55-18

### **2 Timothy 3:1516a**

For this morning, let me draw your attention for the time we have in God's Word back to 2 Timothy chapter 3. Looking again at the passage which has been our focus for a number of weeks. Obviously in studying through 2 Timothy we have come across this passage, verses 15 to 17, in the context of the third chapter. The first week that we looked at it we discussed primarily its intent with regard to Paul writing Timothy, that is the primary significance of it in its context. And then feeling that one look at that text didn't really do justice to it, we took another week and examined the whole idea indicated in verse 16 of all Scripture being inspired by God because that is a tremendously impactful statement that goes way beyond any specific instruction Paul could give to Timothy. The fact that Scripture is inspired is of monumental consequence and so we dug a little more deeply into the matter of inspiration.

And as I was planning to kind of move on in 2 Timothy, I was rereading the epistle and I came back to this same section and in reading it I realized that there was one further tremendously important issue here that had not been addressed that I needed to deal with and that has to do with what I like to call the work of the Word...the work of the Word. We talked about the fact that it was inspired but we must also focus on its work. And you will notice in verse 15 that it says that the sacred writings are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Initially the work of the Word is salvation. Then in verse 16, it is useful, that is inspired Scripture is useful, for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness with the idea that the end product may be a man of God adequate and equipped for every good work.

Now a simple reading of those verses indicates to us five elements of the work of the Word...salvation, teaching, reproof, correction, training and righteousness. Those are the things which the Word does, which the Scripture produces. They're not new to me, they're not new to most of you, they're new to perhaps some of you. And as I thought about it I thought, "Well, it's pretty basic but it's also pretty important." And let me say by way of general introduction that the distinguishing characteristic, I hope, of my own ministry and of Grace Community Church, is a very very strong commitment to the authority of the Word of God. We are definitely a church committed to God's Word. We endeavor to teach God's Word, to preach God's Word, to implement God's Word, to live God's Word, to proclaim God's Word, to exalt God's Word. It is the focal point of everything that we do. When God speaks, we listen.

I think so many times of Revelation 2 and 3, if you have ears to hear then hear what the Spirit says to the churches. So we have always been a church that listens to the Word of God, that is committed to the Word of God, that is submissive to the Word of God. And the focal point of our ministry has been the Scripture. There are many things that a church can do. There are many focuses. There are many sort of themes that a church can camp on. But for us for all these years it has been the Word of God. Our church, our personal lives are dominated by the Word of God. Week in and week out we teach the Bible. Here in the services we preach it expositively, that is explaining its meaning. We go through Scripture after Scripture after Scripture. The reason for that is because of the work of the Word. Because we understand what it does, that's why we give it the main attention.

Let me just remind you of a very important promise with regard to this. Isaiah 55:10 and 11, you don't need to look it up, just listen. "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bare and sprout and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be which goes forth from My mouth. It shall not return to Me empty or void, without accomplishing what I desire and without succeeding in the matter for which I send it."

In other words, God says when I send My Word it always does its work...it always does its work. It never comes back empty. Just like rain and snow produces what grows, My Word produces My will. The Bible is God's messenger. It accomplishes His will. It accomplishes His purpose. The Word of God is depicted in Psalm 147 as a swift messenger. It runs to do God's work. It runs to accomplish God's goals.

You might look just at Psalm 147 for a moment. There are several verses there that really are very vivid. Verse 15, "He sends forth His command to the earth," that's verse 15, "He sends forth His command to the earth, His Word runs very swiftly. He gives snow like wool. He scatters the frost like ashes. He casts forth His ice as fragments. Who can stand before His cold? He sends forth His Word and melts them. He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow. He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel."

And here is this sort of intertwined analogy as God sends the cold and frost and the sun and all the natural elements to produce what He wants to produce, so He sends His Word. And the Word is analogous to that, it goes out to produce the ends that God has intended for it. That's a tremendous confidence that we have who teach the Word of God, who articulate the Word of God, to know that it always accomplishes what God wants it to do, never comes back empty, always produces, always produces, like rain and snow and all the other things that God sends with production in mind. The Word is productive. It is prolific and it accomplishes its purpose. Every word out of God's mouth is bread, it says in Deuteronomy 8:3. It feeds somebody. It nourishes somebody. It makes somebody grow. It accomplishes something.

And so we want to ask the question then, if it does accomplish something, what does it accomplish? What is the work of the Word? What is the purpose of the Word? And let's look at these five things, we'll look at two of them this morning, just briefly giving you what may for most of you be review and then the other three next Lord's day.

The first one is that the Word produces salvation. You'll notice that very familiar verse that we looked at in chapter 3 verse 15. It says that the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation which comes, of course, through faith in Christ Jesus. The thing that he says there is the Word, the sacred writings referring to Scripture, have primarily in that particular verse reference to the Old Testament, but nonetheless Scripture produces salvation. Scripture produces salvation. It makes you wise unto salvation. It is the instrument of salvation. The practical implications of this are obvious.

Before we look at those though let's see if we can't reinforce that truth a little bit by looking namely at the testimony of Jesus Himself. Turn in your Bible to John's gospel. And in John's gospel we have the continual teaching of Jesus about the power of His word and the Word of God. But in chapter 5 and verse 24 we read this, the words of Jesus, "Truly truly I say to you, he who hears My Word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and does not come into judgment but has passed out of death into life." That is a tremendous verse. That is a verse that binds up the essence of the gospel. Believing in God, the God who sent Christ, and hearing the Word brings eternal life and delivers one from judgment, passing out of death into life.

And note, please, the key to it all verse 24, "He who hears My Word." The Word is the agency. The Word is that which begets new life. In John chapter 6, I draw your attention to a couple of verses toward the end of the chapter. And Jesus again teaching in this familiar section where He speaks on the bread of life, but in verse 63 He says, "It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing." Then this, "The words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and are life and if they haven't effected that in you," verse 64 implies, "that's because some of you don't believe." So, the Word mixed with faith produces life.

Chapter 12 of John, and there are other texts you could look at but these are highlights. Chapter 12 and verse 49, Jesus says, "I did not speak on My own initiative." Even Jesus operated under delegated authority and operated by speaking only that which was the Word of God. He said, "My Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment what to say and what to speak and I know that His commandment is eternal life, therefore the things I speak I speak just as the Father has told Me." And again Jesus is articulating the reality that the Word is that which produces eternal life...the Word brings life.

The sum of it all comes in that great watershed verse 31 of chapter 20 in John's gospel which really gives us the reason for the whole book...the whole gospel. "These have been written...these have been written," says John, "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that believing you may have life in His name." And again, eternal life comes by believing the written Word, the revealed Word, the Word of God. Scripture then is the source of that truth which brings salvation.

Look again further into the New Testament, the tenth chapter of Romans and we find that the Apostle Paul was committed to the same truth. In Romans chapter 10, a familiar verse, 17 says, "So faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ." Or some manuscripts the Word of God, I think, preferably the Word of Christ, the New American has it that way. But the point is, one way or the other it's the Word of God or the Word of Christ which are one and the same that produces salvation. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ. That's why you have to have preachers. That's why you have to have those who will go out and speak the truth. It says in verse 13, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved." But how are they going to call on Him in whom they have not believed and how they going to believe in whom they have not heard and how will they hear without a preacher and how will they preach unless they are sent? And even when they are sent the implication is they must hear the Word of Christ. So it is again emphasized that the Scripture is the source.

In Ephesians chapter 5, that great section on marriage as compared to the church. Verse 25 says, "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her that He might sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word." Christ has cleansed His church, saved His church by the washing of water with the Word. The Word again the agency.

And Paul writing to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 refers to the work...the Word of God which performs its work in you who believe. The Word works. Now salvation occurs when you have a ready heart that is open to believe, mixed with the revelation of God. The Word of God in a ready heart, that's the issue.

James refers to the same dynamic in James 1:18. He says, "He brought us forth, He begot us, He redeemed us, He saved us by the Word of truth...by the Word of truth."

So, the Scripture, the Word of God, is the source of salvation. That's why Philippians 2:16 calls it the "Word of life." It is characterized as that which gives life. Psalm 19:7, "The law of the Lord is perfect," what's the rest of the verse? "Converting the soul." It has the power to convert.

And I think back to Nehemiah, a tremendous illustration of this. Look with me for a moment to the eighth chapter of Nehemiah, it's a few books to the left of Psalms. And in Nehemiah chapter 8 we have the introduction of a revival. In Nehemiah chapter 8 it begins...the beginning of a real revival.

And I believe there were many people who were saved in the true sense of Old Testament salvation at this revival. All the people gathered as one man at the gate which was in front of the water gate, the square which is front of the water gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses. Three little words, "Bring the book," really keyed the whole thing. And he brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could listen with understanding and the first day of the seventh month he read from it before the square which was in front of the water gate from early morning until midday in the presence of men and women, those who could understand, all the people were attentive to the book of the law.

They stood there and listened to it being read hour after hour after hour. There was a wooden podium, verse 4, set up for that purpose. And Ezra, verse 5, opened the book in the sight of all the people, standing up above the people, and he opened it and all the people stood up. He blessed the Lord the great God and all the people answered, Amen, Amen. Lifting up their hands they bowed low, worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Verse 8 says that as they read from the book, from the law of God, they translated to give the sense so that they would understand the reading...it had to go from Hebrew into Aramaic which was their commoner language and had to be explained to them. And so they were reading and explaining the Word. The people's response was amazing, it says at the end of verse 9, they were weeping when they heard the words of the law. They were grieved over their sin. They were struck because of the dirth of the law of God in their hearing.

The end result of all of this was the people really drew their hearts back to God. This reading went on. At the end of verse 18 it says they celebrated the feast for seven days and they read from the book of the law, the first part of the verse says daily from the first day to the last day. Then the people began to praise God in chapter 9. They were praising and lifting up adoration to the God who had revealed Himself in Scripture. They were getting their hearts right. Down in verse 28 of chapter 10 after that long list of people who signed the document, it says that they were joining together, making a commitment, taking a curse, verse 29, making an oath to walk in God's law, to keep and observe all the commandments of God our Lord and His ordinance and His statutes.

The net result was the people made a commitment to God. And I believe there was salvation that period of time, through that seven day feast, there was a great movement of God and many were saved. And it was a direct result of simply standing and reading and translating, explaining the Scripture. It has the power to convert the soul, the power to save.

Look at another illustration, taken from the New Testament, namely the eighth chapter of Luke in which our Lord teaches a familiar parable which makes the same major point. Jesus teaching here about the parable of the soils and the sower and the seed. Verse 5 says of Luke 8, "The sower went out to sow his seed and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, was trampled under foot and the birds of the air ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky soil, as soon as it grew up it withered away because it had no moisture. Other seed fell among the thorns and the thorns grew up with it and choked it

out. Other seed fell into good soil, grew up, produced a crop a hundred times as great." And He said, "You better listen to the things I'm saying."

Then in verse 9 they asked Him what it was He was saying. He's explaining, starting in verse 10, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, to the rest it is in parables in order that they seeing may not see and hearing they may not understand." In other words, He says I'm going to explain it to you because obviously you belong to God. To them it will remain a riddle.

The explanation then comes in verse 11. "In the parable the seed is the Word of God." That which produces new life in good soil is the Word of God. That's the point. If the soil isn't right, you're not going to get the product. If it's hard soil like the soil on the road, it says those beside the road are those who have heard, the devil comes, takes away the Word from their hearts so they may not believe and be saved. And those on the rocky soil are those who when they have received the Word, receive it with joy and they have no firm root. They believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. And the seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life and bring no fruit to maturity. The Word of God will fall into places where the soil is not ready. Its full of weeds, full of rocks or just hard. But, verse 15, when the seed falls into good soil, those are the ones who have heard the Word in an honest and good heart and hold it fast and bear fruit with perseverance.

So what you have here is the Word of God placed in a readied heart, a prepared heart produces salvation. The practical implications of this are obvious. The heart and soul of our evangelistic ministry must be the Word of God. People will sometimes say, "Well, if you teach the Bible all the time when do you do your evangelism?" Beloved, the Bible is the greatest tool of evangelism. How could we ever come to the point where we would even question such? When Jesus was asked by a lawyer in Luke 10:25 and 26, he said, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus said to that man, What is written in the law and how does it read to you?" Go to the Scripture. Go to the Scripture. You can go back to the Old Testament, the sacred writings and they are able to make you wise unto salvation which, of course, has come in the fullness of time through that which Christ has accomplished. What does the Scripture say? Jesus said search the Scriptures for they are they which speak of Me.

And then one very very explicit text. First Peter 1, turn to it for a moment, verse 23, "You have been born again," it says, "not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is referring to the seed through the living and abiding Word of God." The seed is the Word of God again. It is that seed placed in good soil that produces salvation. So if we want to be effective in evangelism, we want to teach God's Word. If we want to be effective in reaching our friends, we want to give them God's Word.

Instead of making it very complicated, let me make it as simple as I possible can for you. If you know somebody who is not saved, first thing to do is give them a what? A Bible..Bible, remember that? Don't get too complex. Don't get too carried away with feeling inadequate because you can't explain every theological issue. I mean, you don't need to know all the answers to all the questions, the Bible will be enough.

I talked to a young lady a couple of days ago and she said, "You know, there's so many things I don't understand." Comes out of a drug oriented background. "So many things I don't understand." But she said, "One thing I do understand." She said, "The other night I read the chapter in the Bible called Ephesians," that's the way she said it. "I read the chapter in the Bible called Ephesians. Boy, you can't read that without knowing what the truth is." I said, "Well, that's very interesting." She said, "It's pretty clear there." And I really believe, of course, the Lord has worked on her heart. She has professed faith in Christ and all of a sudden stuff is becoming alive to her but it came through the reading of God's Word.

It's not as complex as we want to make it. And, of course, focusing on that, when you give someone a Bible, encourage them to read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and see if they can survive that. If they can survive that, the soil isn't ready, there's nothing wrong with the seed. The soil isn't ready. God hasn't prepared the soil. But the seed is there. So we need to be committed to that. He says you have been born again through the living and abiding Word of God. And verse 25 says, "This is the Word which was preached to you." He illustrates it in that passage with a quote out of Isaiah chapter 40, comparing the Word of God to the passing flesh. The Word abides, it lives forever, it does its work, it produces life.

This can be illustrated, I think, quite simply in a rather brief but beautiful account of a woman's conversion in Acts 16. Lydia was her name. And it tells about her in verse 14, just very briefly. "A certain woman," Acts 16:14, "named Lydia from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics." This is a business woman, sold purple fabrics for a living. "She was a worshiper of God," that is to say she was upright in the sense of seeking the true God and seeking to worship the true God but had not yet been exposed to the gospel of Christ. She was listening, and then this: "And the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized," so forth and so on.

I love that. The Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. That's the essence of salvation. You speak the truth of God's Word and let the Lord open the heart.

Theoretically it wouldn't do a bit of good if the Lord was opening the heart and there wasn't any truth there. It doesn't do any good, also, for us to speak truth if the heart is not open except for the fact that we have discharged our duty. It cannot bring salvation unless the heart is opened. So our task is to spread the Word, spread the seed, preach the truth, give out God's Word and God's part is

sovereignly, graciously to open the heart.

The implications again, I just reiterate to you, are clear. Now in evangelism we want to give people God's Word, it's that simple, that basic. I mean, this is...this is primer kind of stuff, very basic. But it helps me as we sort of stop here after nearly 20 years of ministry to just go all the way back and say, "Why are we doing this?" Because this is what we are to do. There isn't anything more. Somebody might say, "Well, you know, we've been doing this a long time, can't we do something different?" No. "I mean, we have been teaching the Bible a long time, we've been having expository teaching, we've been going over this biblical...can't we do something else?" No. There never will be anything else because this is what we're mandated to do, this is that which brings salvation.

There's a second thing, let's look at verse 16 of 2 Timothy 3 and that list that is there indicates four things in addition to salvation that is the work of the word. First is teaching, then reproof, then correction, and training in righteousness. We'll save the last three for next time and look just at the one that the Scripture says is teaching or doctrine.

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for doctrine, teaching." This function obviously takes place after salvation has occurred. You can't give doctrine, you can't teach doctrine to a nonbeliever. Why? First Corinthians 2:14, "The natural man understandeth not the things of God, they are foolishness to him because they are spiritually discerned and he's spiritually dead, but we who are saved," he says in verse 16, "have the mind of Christ." We have the Holy Spirit, 1 John tells us, chapter 2. We have no need to be taught by men because we have an anointing from God who teaches us all things. So when you become a believer you receive what theologians have chosen to call "the ministry of illumination by the Holy Spirit." The Spirit takes up residence in your heart and begins to illuminate the Word to you and you begin to be able to learn what it teaches.

Now the term "teaching" here does not describe a process, it describes content. It describes a body of truth, that which is taught, didaskalia, that which is taught. The Scripture then is to deposit with you truth. It gives you a body of truth by which you are to think and act. That's basically it. The Scripture is a body of truth which is to control your thinking and your acting. And so as you study the Word of God you accumulate that body of truth. And the more of that you accumulate, the more circumscribed to God's standard your behavior, your conduct becomes. But it starts with content.

People, and I've said this for years, people cannot do what they do not know. They cannot function on principles they do not understand. They cannot live out nonexistent truth. If you don't know it, you can't do it. Oh, maybe once in a while you'll stumble across it like the blind pig who finds a slop now and then. But generally speaking, you're only going to be able to do what you understand. And so primarily the Scripture then is there to provide for the saved person a repository of truth, principles for life and thought. In fact, we have noted a couple of times in our study of 1 and 2 Timothy that Paul says to Timothy, "Guard that deposit which is entrusted to you," that body of truth. Paul looked at



apostolic doctrine at that which God had taught him and which God had ordained that he pass on as a body of truth to be given. He says in Acts chapter 20, "I have not failed to declare unto you the whole counsel of God. I taught you night and day with tears. I taught you publicly, I taught you from house to house." He preached every weekend in the synagogue. Always, always giving out truth in order that people might have a deposit of truth which would govern their life. And that truth is the same as God's Word. It says in John 17:17 that Jesus said, "Thy Word is truth," to the Father, "Thy Word is truth."

I've always had that kind of a...I don't know, that's almost an insatiable hunger in my own heart, to understand God's Word. It just...I have this hunger to understand it, I want to know what it means by what it says. I can read what it says, I want to know what it means by what it says. And that appetite more than anything else in ministry drives me to study. It compels me. It's the desire to know what God says. I want that body of truth. I don't want any holes. I don't want anything left out. Many people through the years of my ministry have come to me and said, "Well, if I would have known that I never would have done this...well, if I knew that the Bible taught that, I wouldn't have done this...If I would have known that I never would have been in this mess." That's right. You want to know what the Scripture says.

In fact, back in Hosea, do you remember what Hosea's indictment was as God spoke to the prophet in chapter 4? He said, "My people are destroyed for lack of...what?...knowledge." Not lack of zeal, not lack of emotion, not lack of anything but knowledge. They didn't know. And what they didn't know they couldn't live. That's why you need to be in a place that teaches the Word of God and you need to learn the Word of God. Systematic faithful proclamation, declaration of God's truth is foundational to life. We must know God's truth. And so the Scripture gives it to us. It is useful for doctrine. It gives us our framework.

In Exodus 24, I was just thinking where Moses came, recounted to the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances and all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do." That's the attitude. Moses gave them all the words of the Lord...they said all the words of the Lord we'll do. They didn't live up to it but it was a nice thought. It ought to be our commitment too. We want to know all that God said and all that God said we'll do. Why do you think in the great commission we are told to go and make disciples of all men, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have...what?...commanded you? We have the tremendous responsibility of giving the deposit of truth.

And that takes a long time. I've been asked a number of times why I stay so long in one church. Well, I haven't covered all the ground yet. There's a lot to cover. And I know sometimes we think we've learned it all, but that's not the case. And yet on the other hand, there's a sense in which we know the principles of God's Word which are illustrated a myriad of ways throughout Scripture, so we are accumulating and understanding that can guard us and guide us through life and seeing it

repeated in different circumstances and different settings through Scripture. Men must know God's truth.

Look at Matthew for a moment, chapter 22, just to stretch your thinking one more time in this regard. Matthew 22 verse 16 may be one of the most wonderful commendations of Christ ever given by unbelievers. The Pharisees came and tried to catch Jesus in His words, always trying to get Him so they could eliminate Him. They sent their disciples along with Herodians, strange bedfellows. They said, "Teacher," I love this, "we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth and defer to no one for You are not partial to any." I guess secretly in my own heart that would be what I would desire as a...sometime when I go to the grave somebody might say about me, "You are truthful, you teach the way of God in truth and defer to no one for you're not partial to any." What integrity. What absolute and utter integrity. Jesus taught truthfully the way of God in truth and deferred to no one and was not partial to anyone. He couldn't be intimidated, He was committed to truth. What a commendation. He taught God's truth because that's what men needed to know. It wasn't always popular.

Someone said to me the other day, "Well, you know, I was at a place and a certain person from your church came and spoke. And everything he said was true. But he shouldn't have said it because it offended some people." Well, see, that's a question of, I suppose you want to be cautious, there's no sense in literally blasting away at people in all circumstances. But that's a little bit of the spirit of the age which says, "Don't worry about speaking the truth, be much more concerned with not offending anybody." And so you defer. It's a lot more exciting to just speak the truth and see what happens. You can walk away and say, "Well, it was...how did it go?" Oftentimes you get into a deal like..."Oh, it was nice, every body was real happy, it was good, they enjoyed it." That's...maybe that's not the right response. Maybe you should go away and, "How was it?" "Oh, it was good, it was a riot, it was a riot after I was done, there was a big fight, three people got shot, four people knocked down the building. It was great, it was just wonderful. They were just so upset about the gospel." I mean, maybe that's a different approach. I'm not advocating that at this particular point for every situation, but whatever happened to that kind of approach?

Jesus said...they said of Jesus that He taught always the truth, the way of God in truth, deferred to no one and wasn't partial to anybody. Boy, He didn't defer to anyone thinking He might offend them with what He said and He wasn't partial to anyone...picked no sides.

Paul had that same spirit. Paul says in Acts 20 essentially the same thing. I mean, I'm just going to teach exactly what Christ gives me to teach and I'm going to go and teach it wherever I need to go and teach it and I'm not going to worry about what happens to me, and I'm not going to worry about my own life because I don't count it dear to myself.

See, we want to be committed to the truth, people, to building that body of truth that becomes the garrison that sets the walls up for our behavior, for the way we live life. We must be committed to truth. We must be committed to building that strength. In 2 Chronicles 34 it talks about Josiah, the king stood in his place, made a covenant before the Lord to walk after the Lord, to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and with all his soul to perform the words of the covenant written in this book. Boy, what a devoted man...what a devoted man. Let me tell you what he said again. To keep the commandments, first of all he said to walk before the Lord or after the Lord, to keep the commandments, the testimonies, the statutes with all his heart, with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant written in this book.

I mean, that's where it starts in Christian living. That's what God is calling, a people who commit themselves to the Word of God. Now what is the practical implication of this? First of all, you have to know it and then you have to...what?...live it. But it starts with knowing it. I have an old Bible at home and I have it open to this first chapter of Joshua, it sits right in the entrance to our home...when you walk in it's the first thing you see and it's open to these verses, Joshua 1:7 and 8, "Only be strong and very courageous, be careful to do according to all the law which Moses, My servant, commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or to the left so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth but you shall meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it for then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have success. Be careful to do all that is written in it." Every time you walk in or out of our house, I look at that, I'm reminded that I am responsible before God to do all that is written in that book, to do all that is written in that book. One, I have to know what's written in that book so that I can do it. So I'm committed to the fact that Scripture is the source of doctrine, it's the source of teaching. There's no other source. There is no other place to go, folks, it's all here in God's book. There are other helpful books that comment on this, that expand, elucidate, apply this, but this is it.

Let me give it to you in form of an illustration. Ephesians chapter 6 and we'll just pull it together with this one, Ephesians chapter 6. Verse 17 and here in the armor of the Christian we have a vivid illustration, I think, of the matter of the Word of God and its place in the believer's life. Being armed here with our Christian armor to fight against Satan and his demons described for us in verse 12, he gives all these elements of armor. Basically they are all defensive, a helmet to protect us, a breastplate to protect us, a shield to protect us, our feet shod with the preparation that will protect us, allow us to hold our ground, and so forth. And finally you come to an offensive weapon in verse 17 which is the sword of the Spirit.

Now, just to help you understand this, the sword is the word machaira in the Greek, the word rhomphaia has reference to a large sword, a big sword, three, four feet long even, and that's not the word used here. This is a dagger, somewhere around six inches or so, a small little precise weapon that had to be used in very very precise manner in order to deliver a fatal blow. So the Word of God,

first of all, is to be used precisely. It is the sword of the Spirit, not the rhomphaia of the Spirit to be flailed around indiscriminately, you don't bash demons in the head with your huge Bible. The sword has to be used with tremendous discrimination, tremendous astuteness, tremendous care, tremendous skill. So he says the sword of the Spirit and then he tells you what it is. It's the Word of God. And instead of the word logos for Word, he uses the Greek term rhema which basically means a specific statement...a specific statement. It seems to be that he is trying to emphasize here that you use the Scripture with precision, you use the specific statement like a small dagger thrust into a vital area with great dexterity. It isn't the sense that I have the sword of the Spirit because I own a Bible. You could own a lot of Bibles and not have the sword of the Spirit unless you know how to use those specific statements of Scripture which apply at specific points of temptation with precision. That's the issue.

The sword of the Spirit is a precision weapon and it is used with precision to be applied to given situations with precision. And that is why Paul said to Timothy, study or be diligent to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. You must understand it. You must know how to cut it straight. You must know how to properly interpret and apply it so that you can use the sword.

I see myself as a teacher of God's Word endeavoring to give you the sword at every point. You may...you may know the specific statement of God about a lot of things, but maybe you don't know the specific statement of God about a lot of other things. So if you're attacked in that area, you've got no ability to use that weapon because you don't know that specific statement. The challenge in learning God's Word is to master those truths which give you the deposit so that you have the sword at every point and wherever Satan may attack you you can pull that thing out and use it with precision because you know precisely what the Word of God has to say.

The master illustration of this comes, I believe, in the temptation of Jesus. Do you realize that when Jesus was tempted on those three occasions by the devil that every time the devil tempted Him He answered with...what?...Scripture. He quoted Deuteronomy, a passage out of Deuteronomy. Jesus didn't have to do that. Jesus did not have to quote Scripture, He could have said something and it would have become Scripture. He did not have to quote Scripture. Why did He do that? He was giving us a...what?...a pattern, He was giving us an example. He was giving us a means to understand how to deal with temptation. It was Jesus' spiritual secret, if you will, to borrow a somewhat popular thought. It was letting us in to the heart of Christ and how He dealt with the enemy as the pattern for how we are to deal. And in each case, when the temptation came, Jesus quoted a verse that was a direct rebuttal to that temptation. He had the sword. And He could use that thing with precision to strike a fatal blow. And in essence that's what we are to do.

And that's what happens when the Word of God is imbibed and taken in and when you have the sword you can use the sword and you can use it with precision in any given situation. You become

potentially a victor if you apply that which you have. So the Word of God, the Scripture, is useful. It's useful for salvation. It's useful for doctrine. And God wants to bring that Word into our lives as believers constantly, systematically, repeatedly, so that the Word of Christ will dwell in us...what?...richly, abundantly, superabundantly, so that we're literally dominated, saturated, filled with the Word, so that our mind is renewed with the Word in order that we may possess the sword, in order that we may think and act in accord with God's truth.

What is the work of the Word? To save, to teach and it always accomplishes its purpose when it's mixed with a believing receiving heart. And I trust yours is that kind of heart.

You can't stop here because we don't always respond to the Word the way we ought to so the Word also has a ministry of reproof and a ministry of correction and a ministry of instruction which involves chastening. We'll get into that next time. Let's bow together in prayer.

We thank You for that truth in Deuteronomy 8:3 that every Word of God is bread. Father, we thank You for this Word which is indeed bread, which feeds us. Lord, we want to say thank You that the Word came to us and was mixed with faith because You prepared our hearts by Your sovereign grace. We want to thank You that You plowed the soil up, that You allowed Your Holy Spirit, yea, You commissioned Your Holy Spirit to do a convicting work in our heart and we were convicted of sin and righteousness and judgment. The soil was made ready and when the Word came, we believed. We thank You for that life giving Word.

And, Father, we thank You, too, for the deposit of truth, that doctrine which guards our thinking and our acting. We thank You for the fact that You've given us not only the book but You've given us the indwelling teacher, the illuminator, the very author of the book..what a thought...that we should not only possess the book but have living in us the one who wrote it. O Lord, no wonder we don't need to trust men but we have an anointing from the Thee to teach us all things. Help us, Lord, who have been saved by the power of the Word to be built up by its power, to be nourished in the words of faith, good teaching. Help us to allow the Word of Christ to dwell in us richly so that we have the outflow of all those wonderful things described in Colossians 3. Help us to have that mind renewed. Help us to be able to think on things pure and lovely and just and good, things in the Word. May we respond to the injunction of Joshua 1 to never ever let our minds depart from Your Word. May we like the people of old, like Josiah, make a covenant to walk after the Lord, to keep His law and His testimonies and His statutes all the days of our life.

Thank You that You've given us the content to govern life. You've given us the content to defeat Satan. You've given us all we need. We thank You that the Word will accomplish its work in us who receive it, for Jesus sake. Amen.

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