

The Bible is useful, if we will use it

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Of all the characters in the New Testament, I could identify with Timothy the most I think. He was a protégé of the Apostle Paul, and became the Pastor or Bishop of the churches in the important city of Ephesus at a very early age. Paul writes these two letters to Timothy to give him instruction, but mostly to give him encouragement. He tells Timothy to not let anyone look down on him because of his youth and inexperience...because he has the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be the Pastor of these Churches and the backing of the Apostle. The letters bounce back and forth between Paul's teaching for the whole church and Paul's tender encouragement for Timothy himself.

One unique thing about Timothy in the age he lived in was that he was not converted, but rather he was raised in a Christian home. This was becoming more and more common. But it was still rare in this first century church. Most Christians were converts from pagan lifestyles and religions. But Timothy's mother had converted, and his grandmother before her. So Timothy had grown up in a Christian home and gone to a Christian Church his whole life. He had come to believe and follow Jesus gradually over time...believing in him was a natural and normal part of his life...a by product of all the love from his mother and grandmother and the rest of the church family who loved him. But there were those who felt that in some ways Timothy was lacking because he had not had a dramatic conversion experience. He had not turned from a life of crime or carousing or shameful, sinful behavior. Timothy had grown in his understanding and acceptance of God's grace and Jesus' love for him. He grew up knowing that Jesus loved him, and he came to accept for himself the love of Christ.

It is important to note that we do not just learn from preachers and teachers, as good as we might be...cough, cough! Brother Paul

especially! But others close to us and dear to us are often the very best teachers. We learn the faith over time from people who nurture and guide us and care for us and love us. Timothy was part of a church family and a Christian home. He had many mentors, and Paul says that he knows the faith that was in his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois abides in him as well. Both taught him in word and in example the love of Jesus and to live in his spirit.

And they taught him the Scripture. Paul says from his infancy, Timothy was taught the scripture. Nothing is like the scripture. Nothing lasts like it, nothing speaks like it. Nothing can be applied to our lives like it can throughout our lives.

It can make us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. It points to Jesus as the savior of the world. He is the fulfillment of the Scripture. You may remember how Jesus himself appeared to two of his disciples after the Resurrection as they walked the road to Emmaus, and how he began to show them in the scripture...starting with the writings of Moses, how the Messiah must die and rise again, and continued through the Prophets... Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise of God's salvation in the Old Testament, the hope that was to come. He is the bright and morning star, who calls us to a new relationship of love.

And Paul goes on to talk about the Scripture. He says that ALL Scripture is inspired by God. It is all God Breathed. The word for Spirit in the Old Testament is Rouche, the same word for Wind or Breathe. God's wind or breath breathes through the scripture. It blows through these individual people. It does not dictate what or how they will speak, but inspires them. We are told in Hebrews that the Scripture is alive and active, and sharper than a two edged sword...cutting both ways, if we try and cut someone with it, we too are often cut. You can't use the scripture to cut someone down without cutting yourself down too. The scripture has something to say to everyone, even if it is well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the rest of the master! We should all read it ourselves, rather than believe what others tell us it says. The

Bible is meant to be read in the language of the people, the common language of the day. It is to be understood and studied at times, but more often just felt!

All scripture is useful. Not just beautiful and inspiring, but useful. Useful,...how? He lists four things. This is not an exhaustive list. But it is instructive.

1. Teaching. The Scripture is used for teaching. It gives us knowledge. Knowledge about God. God reveals God's self to us. We can not go up to heaven and discern or discover who God is...nor can we truly discern who God is by taking apart God's creation, although there are clues aplenty here. No. God has revealed himself to us and for us...and this revelation is made perfect in the person of Jesus the Christ. The story of this revelation is told to us in four distinctly different human perspectives in the Gospels...in them we hear Jesus' own words, we see his own actions, we learn of his life and his death and his resurrection and what it all means...and in the later books we learn what it meant to those who were closest to him, who followed him and who were in the best position to interpret what Jesus was all about and who he truly was.

The Scripture also teaches us about ourselves. We see ourselves in its pages, in its stories, its parables, in its proverbs, and in its prayers. We know it speaks to us and we learn so much about who we really are...

And it teaches us who's we are, and who we can and will become. It teaches us about who will win the battle and what will happen in the end. We can read the end of the story of history before it comes

and know the end of time. Sounds like cheating, but it gives us great comfort. Justice will be come, His will will be done!

2. It is good for Rebuking. Rebuking is setting straight what is crooked. It is correcting the errors in our lives. It is putting us back on the correct track. The scripture exposes our errors in thinking and rebukes our misconduct. We have all done things that we know we should not have done. And we have all not done things we know we should have done. We have sat on the side lines while others fought the good fight. We have sat idly by while others struggled with illness, poverty, injustice and we have done nothing. We have allowed evil to succeed because we have not done our part to oppose it. We all have done things we are not proud of, and often they go unchallenged for so long that they become the norm in society. The scripture keeps us honest. It rebukes us.

3. The scripture corrects us. This really means literally putting us on the correct path. We do not overcome evil with evil, we know that this does not work. Those who live by the sword die by the sword. NO. our challenge is to overcome evil with good. The Bible corrects us and helps us do good. It helps us correct our actions, our attitudes, our values, and our whole system...and see the whole world as a very different place. With Christ as our leader, everyone is our brother or sister. Everyone. We have the power to change our behavior and our attitudes in Christ. We don't have to remain the same. We are being transformed by the renewing of our minds...a continual process of change and renewal.

4. And finally, the scripture is training us in righteousness. This is more than just doing what is right, it is making a habit of it. It is learning to live in Grace, living in the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Freedom and hope.

The Scripture trains us to live like an athlete trains, so that some of our decisions will be so second nature to us, that we will do the word without thinking! Not just hearing it, and then trying to figure out what to do...but automatic action.

It is important that our faith becomes practical and gets lived out in the real world. The Apostle goes on...These four purposes of the scripture have a cumulative affect...

“So that the person of God maybe thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Not just ready or equipped, but thoroughly equipped...for EVERY good work.

Not just sharing the word of Christ or caring for the sick or serving the poor, but being a good parent, a loving husband, a good mother, brother, employee, boss, any relationship and every relationship is to reflect our Lord and be influenced and inspired by the word....

“That we might be equipped for every good work...having the tools necessary to do the work.”

All Scripture is Inspired by God and is useful, **IF** we will use it...