

Riverside Reflections – Week 2 – A Biblical Foundation

The things we will discuss today are not meant to be abstract concepts, they are truths meant to be lived out. The thing we have to be careful about when “doing” theology or worship is that we can love thinking about God more than we actually love God, or that we can love loving God more than we actually love God. We seek not only to know what scripture says, but believe the God it reveals and follow what it teaches. Some things we could discuss, such as how we know which books are in the Bible, how to properly interpret the Bible, and many other important things, are beyond the scope of this single lesson. What we are going to learn are some basics about the truth, power, and sufficiency of scripture.

One of the primary objectives of pastors and Bible teachers must be to bring the congregation to a place of submission to the Word of God. We are to give a framework for proper biblical thought. Then you can solve problems by introducing a biblical principle that deals with it and conform to the principle. If we don't teach the Word of God and we don't build into our church a submission to the Word of God, when a problem comes and we offer a biblical solution we won't be able to relate to that. We will assume it's just another opinion. We must be committed to a lifelong process of learning His Word (Matthew 28:18-20 / John 8:31-32). Our goal then becomes to grow to maturity in and unto Christ (Ephesians 4:15-16 / 2 Peter 3:18).

We hold the Bible to be true, and to be sufficient. What sort of witness is it when we assure the world that just because we are Christians it doesn't mean we believe what the Bible says? What point is there, indeed, in being a non-Bible-believing “Christian”? Founding our beliefs and practices upon the Bible, and not upon the experiences of a person who claims special knowledge, or who twist the scriptures to suit their false doctrine, this is what distinguishes us from the other religions, cults, and aberrations of true Christianity.

Scripture is Sufficient – 2 Timothy 3:14-17 – Paul told Timothy about the difficult days that he will face (3:1-9). Timothy will not have Paul personally present to lead and guide him (4:6-9). So what would Timothy have to guide him? Timothy would have the teaching Paul gave him, and the life which underscored that teaching (3:10-13). Timothy would have the grounding in Scripture that his believing grandmother and mother had given him from infancy (3:14-15). And that, Paul insists, would be sufficient to make him wise. He needed to lead the church and find others who would follow his lead and teach others (2 Timothy 1:13; 2:2, 7, 15; 4:1-2).

Then, in vs.16-17 Paul speaks of *all* Scripture. Now some might say that in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 Paul was referring only to the OT, but that isn't true, because most of the scriptures were already complete. Peter brings the OT and NT together by saying that words of the Apostles were also authoritative (2 Peter 3:2), specifically referring to Paul's writings as scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16). Paul uses the term he used earlier in 1 Timothy 5:18, where he quotes Luke 10:7 (Deuteronomy 25:4), so the gospels are included. Timothy would have had access to these writings (2 Timothy 4:13). Paul is saying that the Word of God, including the Old Testament retrospectively and the New Testament prospectively, including his own writing (1 Thessalonians 2:13) represents the very words of God, and thus tells us everything we need to understand in order to know and serve God (cf. 2 Peter 1:3-4).

All scripture is God breathed so even the narrative portion are for our use (cf. Romans 15:4, 1 Corinthians 10:1-5), although the way we are to use them depends on certain factors. For example, what about those seemingly endless genealogies in the OT books, what are they there for? To the Hebrews, their history and the names of their ancestors represented the salvation of God in their midst. The remembrance and rehearsal of their collective story was a constant reminder of God's promise to Abraham. To remember their past, in an important sense, was to realize that God was in their present, and was part of their future.

Coming out of the Babylonian exile, the reading of these names and the rehearsal of the national history marked the truth that God was still faithful to the covenant made with Abraham. This same emphasis is clear in the NT usages of genealogies. To continue to rehearse the history, and to show Christ as the culmination of it, was to argue that not only was God continuing to fulfill the divine promise made to Abraham, but moreover that God's promise was completed in the person and work of Christ.

So we can see that those lists are very important, but we don't need to try and derive some deeper meaning from them. What the Bible doesn't teach, and teaches against, is looking for esoteric things and clues like Bible codes. These are not mysteries to unlock they are mysteries that are now revealed. We do not need some other book as the "key" to provide a spiritualized meaning to an already clear text. God gave us scripture to reveal Himself, His works, and His plan and we are not supposed to go wandering off into myths and looking for secret knowledge (cf. 1 Timothy 1:3-4, 4:7, 6:3-5, 11, 20 / 2 Timothy 2:16,23, 3:5, 7-8 / Titus 1:14, 3:9).

Here is the point: in essence, spiritually speaking, if the apostles didn't teach it you don't need it, and you definitely don't want it (1 Corinthians 4:6 / Galatians 1:8-9 / 1 John 4:5-6). Since Paul says that Scripture thoroughly equips we can unequivocally conclude that another revelation can only be inferior.

Scripture is Clear – 2 Peter 3:15-18 – perspicuity of scripture – clear & understandable.

What it does NOT mean

1. All scripture is equally clear and easily understood as to its precise meaning
2. Interpretation, explanation, and exposition by a Bible teacher are never necessary
3. Believers will agree universally on every point

What it DOES mean

1. Scripture is clear enough for the simplest person to live by, yet deep enough for the most intellectual and diligent readers
2. Obscurity is the fault of our finite and sinful minds, not a problem with the Bible
3. Interpreters must use ordinary means

We cannot ask the Holy Spirit to replace our intellectual engagement with the text. We need to learn it and believe it (cf. Philippians 3:15-16 / John 7:17). Whenever we depart from the plain and simple meaning of Scripture, interpreted using normal means, we are headed for trouble.

When looking at texts, we can understand them to apply to Christians universally, such as Matthew 28:19-20 (go therefore and teach all nations), or to someone or something specifically, such as Matthew 10:5-6 (do not go to anyone but the Jews, a command for the disciples only and for that particular time period only, overruled by the Great Commission), or principally, such as Philippians 2:3-4 (Paul was speaking to a particular church but the principle of Christlike behavior applies to us) or not at all, as with 2 Timothy 4:13 (Paul tells Timothy to bring his papers, which we are obviously not to do). Texts meant specifically may also apply principally, so sometimes texts that aren't teaching on a particular subject may still give us a principle to follow and apply to other matters.

Scripture is Powerful – Hebrews 4:12 – In this verse there are two action verbs, in the present tense, which means they are this continuously, as regarding the Word of God. The first verb talks of what the Word is and the second speaks of what the Word does.

The first verb is living – the Word has the life and power of God in it. The Word of God brings the convicting power of the Lord. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Two other words give us a description of this living.

- Active – full of energy, powerful. It is effective (Isaiah 55:9-11). Its effectiveness may not be immediately evident to us, but as we mature we will understand it is always so, we will see it being effective in changing lives and also in hardening hearts. It will be a surgeon or an executioner, as we see while progressing through Hebrews 4:11-16. It will perform surgery and bring new life, or it will be the death sentence to the rebel. The Word of God either heals or it hardens, and it never fails to do its intended work.
- Sharper – comparative, not just sharp but sharper. In other words, it is not only effective it is precise. It not only gets the job done, it gets it done exactly right. It goes as deep as it needs to, it hits the root. This is what the word of God is; it is living, and therefore effective and precise, and that is why it is able to discern all things.

The second verb is piercing – to penetrate – two applications are given to describe it.

- The first is division – to separate – soul and spirit (spiritual matters), joints and marrow (physical matters). In other words, as written at the time these things would be impossibly hard to divide but that is how penetrating God's Word is, it can and will find out the problem right at the root, no matter how deep it is buried, no matter how many layers it has to separate. Like soul and spirit, the immaterial parts of man, things we cannot get a hold of, God's Word can. Back when this was written, bone marrow transplants weren't available back then. But God's Word penetrated as deep as that. The point is that the Word of God lays bare our problem; it exposes it for what it is. It gets to the bottom of it.
- The second is discerning – judging – not condemning but ascertaining what is really going on. It is able to see what needs to be done. It gives a critique. The Word gets to the bottom of things and passes judgment on what it finds. A prosecutor presents the facts of the case, but the judge determines what is right and wrong; the Word of God does both. Thoughts and intents, both the feelings of desire and the imaginations of the mind. As we

faithfully use the Scriptures we will be trained to discern the wrong ways of thinking that have become fortresses for sin in our lives so that our minds can be renewed and our lives transformed. This is the surgical power of God's Word. This is what the Word of God does. We cannot take it for granted. The Word of God identifies the sickness and because it is alive it can give new life. It can change the heart.

Scripture is stronger than experience – 2 Peter 1:16-19 – Think about all that Peter had experienced and what he is saying about the Word of God.

- He lived with Jesus for 3 years
- He saw Jesus perform miracles
- He saw Jesus transfigured into a glorious state, and Moses and Elijah
- He heard God the Father's audible voice
- Peter had performed miracles himself
- He had preached the Pentecost sermon, relating it all to scripture
- The Word is as sure as any of that, it is a confirmation of Christ (cf. Luke 16:22-31)
- We would be wise to get it down in us until Jesus rises up out of us

The common objection – Now look at vs.20-21 – You can't just say, "Well, men wrote it, therefore it must be flawed", because if the claim of the Bible itself is true, God can get men to write what He wants them to. It is not self-refuting to claim that men wrote the very words of God and that it is inerrant.

Jesus and the Old Testament – Jesus said the OT was about Him (Luke 24:27 / John 5:39). He quotes from every section: the Pentateuch, the Wisdom Literature, the Poetry, the Prophets (both major and minor), and the Historical material. He quotes them as if they were authoritative, from God Himself. Sometimes Jesus refers to the text itself as "God said." Sometimes He says "Scripture says..." sometimes He says "Moses says..." etc. Clearly, when you examine the words, in His mind those terms are interchangeable. Jesus believed in the OT.

Jesus and the New Testament – John 16:12-13 – Some talk as if only the words of Jesus are needed and the words of the Apostles are not necessary, as if the words of Jesus are somehow against the words given by the Holy Spirit to the other biblical writers. Jesus himself dismisses with this idea, Christ said that the Spirit would not only bring all the teachings of Jesus to their remembrance, but that He would also bring new truth and revelation to the Apostles upon His death. The epistles do not confuse the teachings of Christ, they magnify them. Paul declared that "we have the mind of Christ" in accordance with Jesus' own words (1 Corinthians 2:16). If we want to truly be "red letter Christians" then we ought to pay attention to what those red letters of Jesus have to say about the authority of the apostolic writings. Jesus believed in the NT.

Jesus and KJV only – 1 Peter 1:24-25 (Isaiah 40:8) / Psalm 119:160 – God's Word endures in some form believers will be able to access from generation to generation. It is not that every single word will be preserved in a certain form, but every concept, principle, law, doctrine.

In Matthew 5:18, when Jesus uses the phrase – "iota or dot (jot and tittle)" this does not mean that we will always be able to point to a single copy and say that every period and paragraph is

written exactly the same as in the original. A letter perfect form of God's Word could not be identified with certainty even in Jesus time. Multiple copies already existed, and variations included whole words. Jesus quoted freely from the handmade copies of the Greek version of the OT known as the Septuagint.

Scripture is Trustworthy – we can trust the Bible even if we don't have the original documents.

The Abundance of Existing Manuscripts – the New Testament is by far the most preserved text of the ancient world, both in terms of the number of existing manuscripts and the time difference between the earliest manuscripts we have and the originals they represent.

The Insignificance of Most Variants – There are many good reasons for a rock solid confidence that 98-99% (not an abstract number) is the same as the original, and even then, it is not that 98-99% percent of the original text exists; it is that more than 100 % exists. We have all the originals say; in that 1-2% that is different, scholars try and find what is likely not original and discard it. It is never mere conjecture. This confidence in the text is shared by people of many theological positions, across conservative/liberal lines, denominational lines, etc.

The Preservation of Primary Doctrines – no major doctrine of the Christian faith is affected in any significant way by any viable textual variant. Those few places where we are not sure never encroach on any issue of major significance, they are doubts on how to spell a few names, word order, differences in style, or confusion concerning synonyms.

Scripture is what we need – Scripture contains everything necessary for our spiritual life. It is surer than any experience. It contains divine principles that are the best guide for us. It makes the thoughts of God clear not cloudy. It is perfect and therefore lasts forever. It is true and capable of producing righteousness. Scripture is infinitely more precious than anything this world has to offer. Psalm 19 is a clear testimony to the power of God's Word.

Psalm 19:1-6 – general revelation (in the world)

Psalm 19:7-14 – special revelation (in the Word)

- Vs.7-8 – *attributes* of the Word
 - 7a – its teaching makes you turn
 - 7b – its witness makes you wise
 - 8a – its guidance gives you gladness
 - 8b – its instruction gives you insight

- Vs.9-11 – *appreciation* of the Word
 - 9-10 – its nature makes you hungry
 - 11 – its nurture makes you holy

- Vs.12-14 – *application* of the Word
 - 12-13 – it exposes sin, makes you pray
 - 14 – it evidences salvation, makes you praise