

Why the Word is so Important

Nutritionists remind us that "we are what we eat." Certainly one of the basic factors determining the general health of a person is diet.

In the same way, the spiritual fitness of a disciple is vitally related to his diet of the Word. Scripture not only is able to give the wisdom that leads to salvation (2 Timothy 3:15), it is also the means to spiritual growth following the new birth (see 1 Peter 2:2 for example).

These uses of the Word are illustrated in Matthew 13, which records a series of parables spoken by the Lord Jesus. The first parable (the Sower) depicts the Word with reference to salvation. The seed sown on the various types of soil (heart conditions) is identified as the Word (see verses 1-9, 18-23). But the second parable (the Wheat and the Tares) suggests a further development. Here the good seed does not stand for the true Word, as we might have expected, but instead represents the sons of the Kingdom (see verses 24-30, 38-43).

The word of the first parable was received and incarnated in the lives of the people so that they became the good seed of the second parable! Stated

another way, the Word first comes to us (our initial reception of its message about Jesus results in our salvation); then the Word grows in us (it is "translated" into our lives so that they manifest it).

The Word is thus indispensable for the believer both because of its character and because of what it does (its functioning or operation). These two aspects are set forth in 2 Timothy 3:16,17.

The Character of the Word of God

2 Timothy 3:16 begins, All Scripture is inspired by God. Note that the margin of the NASB indicates that the phrase inspired by God is literally

God-breathed. The character of Scripture is the result-of-the-breath-of-God.

Now, just as breath partakes of the breather's qualities, so Scripture partakes of the qualities of its Originator. Since God is wholly true and trustworthy, His Word is also completely true (the term "inerrant" is sometimes used in this connection) and trustworthy (or "infallible"). God's Word is thus authoritative. We can believe it, rely on it, and obey it without reservation. (Look up Genesis 2:7, Job 33:4 and Psalm 33:6 for other instances when God "breathed.")

Notice also that it is the written Scriptures that are inspired, not the men who wrote them. When someone affirms belief in the inspiration of the bible he means that he believes God (through the Holy Spirit, 2 Peter 1:21) so guided the human authors in the writing of Scripture that, without destroying their individuality or literary style, their final written product communicated (when properly understood!) exactly what God wanted to say to mankind.

This question of what is finally authoritative is extremely important for the disciple of Jesus Christ. What channel of communication is used by the Lord to communicate His will to those who follow him ? There would seem to be four possible answers to this question:

1. HUMAN REASON.
2. EXPERIENCE.
3. AN INSTITUTION
4. THE BIBLE

The Function of the Word of God

After describing the character of Scripture, 2 Timothy 3:16,17 continues: "and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." Four functions of Scripture are thus outlined together with the anticipated result of these operations of Scripture.

Because it is God-breathed, all Scripture is profitable or useful to the accomplishing of four things: teaching, reproof, correction, and training.

The anticipated result of these operations of the Scripture in a believer's life is that he or she may be adequate. This word describes a situation where all the necessary parts are not only present but also harmoniously combined to function. This thought is carried further in the phrase, equipped for every good work. Equipped renders a verb which is a strengthened form of the adjective adequate. It means perfectly prepared, and the perfect tense suggests the abiding results of this equipping.

Thus, the Word is designed to teach, warn, correct, and direct us that we may employ all God has given us for the ends we were designed for. What disciple can afford to neglect the Word ?!