



8. A Passion for God's Word (2 Tim 3:10-4:4)

This is the eighth sermon in our series *Heart of Discipleship* and in it we have seen that we are all called to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Discipleship is not an optional extra. Baptism is a mark of that discipleship because it is a statement that we have repented: I am not going to go my way but I am going to walk God's way. *I have decided to follow Jesus - no turning back!* We then saw that the cost of going God's way, of following Jesus is very costly because He wants our whole allegiance. We saw that God equips us but also calls us to holiness. We have seen in the last two weeks how we need to seek God's will for our lives, for the lives of others and for the Church.

We saw that in discerning the will of God, that God reveals Himself to human beings in two ways - through His written word, and by His Spirit. If we are people of relationship - children of the Living God, we need to spend time speaking to Him and letting Him speak to us. This week we are going to look in more detail at the word and next week at prayer.

God's written word - the Bible. Not so much a book but a library of 66 books. This morning I want to get to the heart of this passage so I'm not going to cover what most sermons on the word of God cover, because the majority of you will probably agree with me to a greater or lesser extent.

 that to quote our own Statement of Faith *"the Bible as the inspired and infallible word of God as originally given, and is the supreme authority in all matters concerning what we believe and how we live."* We won't be exploring to see why we would make a statement like that is (2 Tim 3:16 says much the same), just that in making such a statement, it poses some important issues for our lives.

 that the word of God has a powerful effect on people's lives. That again we give mental assent to but we shall see shortly that it should have such an effect on OUR lives!

 that the word of God was written in original human languages with all the fallen fallibilities that our languages have. I'm not even going to go into arguments over which English translation is best. I'll just say this, you might have problems using translations, but God doesn't have a problem, for two reasons. Firstly, God chose to reveal Himself using a means of communication that by its nature is liable to cause mis-communication of God's word amongst people. Think about how many Bible studies you have been involved with personally or with others where you have struggled and even argued with people about what it means because you can't comprehend the English, let alone know Greek or Hebrew. Secondly, God has no compunction about using translations Himself - all of the scripture quotes in the NT are from the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures called the Septuagint, not the original tongue.

This passage in 2 Timothy is very important because it isn't just about the authority of the Scriptures, but what effect they should have on our lives. Paul was writing to a younger man he took into his entourage in Lystra (Acts 16) and who had become to him a dear friend and fellow leader whom Paul was now writing a second letter of encouragement to. Here was a Timothy who had to deal with two important issues in

the life of the church and they were, persecution and false teaching: look at verses 12 and 13

12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

How could this younger man have authority and how could the people he was ministering to know what he said was the truth of God? The answer was the Scriptures. Although this passage was written as a pastoral letter between friends, we have it because we learn some basic principles about the word of God which we need to apply to our lives if we are to be healthy disciples.

We grow by knowing the Scriptures

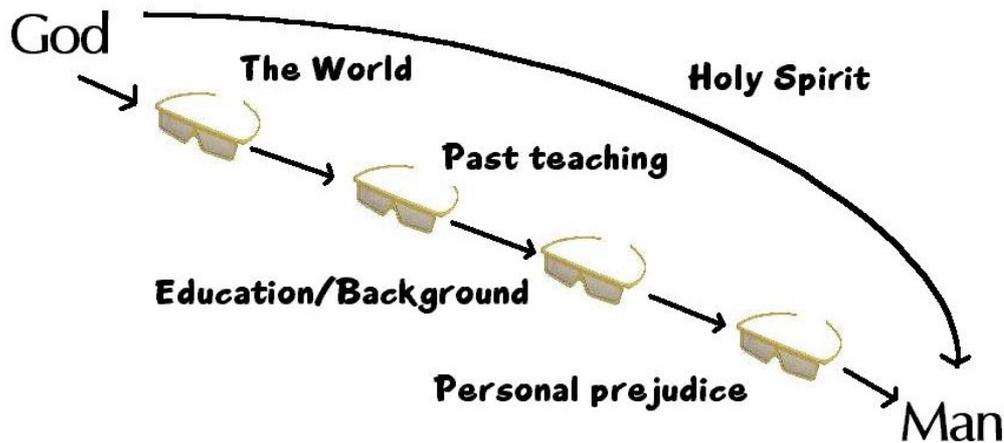
But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Now you can see why I didn't bother myself with some of the common comments on Scripture because we need to cut to the chase. Timothy had grown and matured in his faith because he knew the ways of God. This verse suggests this was because of two things, firstly because he had confidence in the people that had taught him and secondly because he knew the scriptures which made him wise to salvation. There are two points which are connected. He received good teaching and he knew it was good teaching - why - because he knew the scriptures.

One of the things that has become apparent to me since I came here is that we have all come from different backgrounds and we have different emphases on belief, particularly on "matters indifferent" - things that aren't important to salvation BUT may be important for our healthy growth and development of us as believers. In this case the world has entered in and we "respect" our differences of opinion and in one sense it is good to love and respect one another as we are commanded to do.

But on these matters, what does God say? It's one thing to have a difference of opinion with others on a matter of faith - but there is only one real answer and that's God's and for our own spiritual well-being, we should discern it for ourselves.

I'm pretty sure we wouldn't say to Him "Well Lord, I know it says in Scripture that I shouldn't do this, but everyone else is and you've got to keep up with the times" or "Lord I know it says this in Scripture, but I was taught by a great Christian leader who said something else and frankly I prefer his interpretation of scripture". Ridiculous? I'd say that all of us have done this sort of thing to God at some time in our lives and are probably still doing it!



Let me show you a picture that I've used before. We all filter what God says in His word, to the end that often the meaning is changed to suit us. If we see this as putting on a series of dark glasses, so that eventually we see nothing. It's easy to do and is at the bottom of most disagreements people have about the scriptures or the Christian faith.

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What we need to do is to decide what God is actually SAYING irrespective of what we may have understood of the passage in the past and pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal God's will despite our filters. We need to pray that the spirit will take away our sunglasses and see the glory of what God is revealing to us of Himself.

God gives us His word, but as human beings, our mind, our society and Christian teachers filter the message so that what we may perceive is something different to what was actually said. You can see it in various doctrines and practices of the church over the centuries. Why is it we do things in certain ways? Why do we have our communion wine in little cups? Why is it not wine? Why is the bread white? Why is it leavened? Does it matter? What does Scripture say?

The first two things you get taught in Bible college are these: exegesis and church history. Why? Exegesis is the study of the Bible to determine what it actually SAYS and what it meant to the people who originally read it. Because that's what it means. There's far less mystique in scripture than you think. It usually means what it says. It is only different where scripture itself suggests a further meaning such as in prophecy. The problem is that we add the mystique and the error.

Church history is an important one too, because we can see how millennia of human experienced has clouded the truths of scripture. To come back what I just said about communion, you'll find plenty about it in history books - individual cups: hygiene - no wine: the temperance movement - white bread: a modern fad. All noble but not scriptural. Does it matter? Should it matter? In one sense, no because the important thing is that we remember the Lord until He comes, but it makes you think how easily we accept what we believe and what we do without exposing it to the light of scripture.

But in scripture we have the example of Timothy. Here was a man who knew his scriptures. He had the ability to discern truth and that perhaps neatly takes us on to our second point:

We are equipped by the Scriptures

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

A feature of this series on discipleship is that God equips us to be the people He wants us to be. Part of that equipping is the use of scripture. Here's the verse that is one of the key ones in scripture *All Scripture is God-breathed* - it's inspired. It stands as God's word. God has spoken and we must pay careful heed to what He has said. The bottom line is that in the end it is our authority. If you want to examine the truth of God in any matter, you don't rely on what you have thought or what your denomination said, but you examine the truth of God, look in His word. And what is it useful for:

- ◆ *teaching,*
- ◆ *rebuking,*
- ◆ *correcting*
- ◆ *training in righteousness*

That covers most aspects of teaching and Christian development. We are taught the will of God through it, we can rebuke those who are moving outside of God's will as a result, we can correct them by showing them God's word and we can train them in the right way. I know these are instructions for a Christian leader, but they apply to all of us as we minister to one another as part of God's people.

And this applies to us individually too. We've explored on a previous occasion the importance of having the right equipment. Here it is - how much do we heed what God is saying to us through His word?

This is why it's so important that we are people like Timothy who knew His scriptures. Because in knowing them we are not blown around by every wind of doctrine.

We have a responsibility to take care with Scripture

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: 2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction

Timothy had this charge - preach the word. We see the words in verse 2 match 3:16. When Timothy was told to preach the word it meant the Scriptures. Preach what's there. Preach it whether it's in season or out - in other words preach it whether you are popular or not. Timothy was encouraged to correct and rebuke - why - because he did that with the authority of scripture..

In one sense these are words to me as one who teaches - to use scripture and not be afraid to use it to preach what God says. We live in an age where speaking what God says is not popular and sometimes we feel it's better to keep quiet. But we are the people of God and need to speak truth. One of the reasons why Christianity is so much on the decline is not because we have spoken the truth, but because we haven't and have let the world do what they want. We are called to preach in season and out of season and these days, we are out of season.

But Timothy was called to encourage too. He was also called to use patience and careful instruction. Timothy was encouraged to preach with great patience and careful instruction. Let's be people who are prepared to hear what God is saying to us. One of the biggest frustrations to preachers is the disappointment that people don't respond to something you feel passionately about. I know from my lay preaching days and even as a minister, that being younger than my audience can lead to a simple

problem - that there are people out there who say to themselves “what can he teach us” or worse “I’ve never heard that taught like that - so it must be wrong”. Let’s take care. As a preacher I am called to preach what I believe is in accordance with God’s word. If you agree, go home and take another look and let the Spirit minister to you further. If you don’t then fine, you have a right to your opinion. But go home and look at the passage again and let the Spirit minister to you and make sure you know why you have that opinion and can justify it in scripture. If you can’t then you have some soul searching to do and need to ask God to take away the sunglasses!

🕒 We should not be ignorant of the Scriptures

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths

We live in an age that is sometimes called “post modern”. It’s an age where we respect what people believe. It’s an age where we allow God’s word to be altered to suit the needs of our society and our personal needs. It’s an age where if people want to believe myths they can.

And we as God’s people should not be polluted with this nonsense. The trouble is that we are polluted with it. But like Timothy, I believe we are people who are not called to walk in ignorance but in the light of God’s word. Let’s strive to be people of the word.



What do we say to all this. Do we want to grow as disciples? Then we need to know what we believe and why we believe it. We need to be people of the word!

We need to know God’s word. How often do we pick it up?

We need to know God’s word for ourselves and not rely on someone’s secondhand belief. How often do we just meditate on what God is saying to us. How often are we bothered to try to work out the difficult bits for ourselves?

We need to have a clear idea of how we should live our lives before God - scripture equips us for every good work

We need how to use God’s word when we fellowship with others and when we minister to people.

The question is:

How much time do you spend with God’s word?

How much time do you spend with God meditating on His word?

How much effort do you make to understand God’s word and how it applies to your life?

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.