

Real Faith for Real People:
“Why Should I Read The Bible?”
II Timothy 3:14-17
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A cartoon in the New Yorker magazine portrays a man making an inquiry at a large metropolitan bookstore. The clerk begins tapping on her computer, spelling out the word B-I-B-L-E. “Yes,” said the clerk, “we have it. You will find it in the self-help section of the store.” Sometimes I wonder if that cartoon is all too true.

Have we who read the Bible reduced the Bible to nothing more than another book in the self-help section? When we ask new members to affirm their faith in the scriptures as found in the Old and New Testaments, what do we mean? Let us think about some of these things today.

THE WORD OF GOD FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD. THANKS BE TO GOD.

The word of God is inspired by God. Paul said it well when he said to Timothy, *“All scripture is inspired by God.”*

To inspire is to stimulate to creative activity. To inspire is to give one the idea of. To inspire is to motivate, invigorate and encourage. To inspire is to be moved by supernatural powers. Paul says all scripture is *“God breathed.”*

So, we have this compilation of books, sixty-six all together, written by forty authors from three different continents, in three different languages over a period of 1,500 years. This book of history, poetry, prophecy, stories, letters, biographies and practical advice has been translated into 1,946 languages. After all these years, it continues to be a best seller. The B-I-B-L-E, yes that’s the book for me!

To be inspired does not indicate dictation. When Mohammad received the Koran, he sat under a tree and received the revelation without the benefit of formal education. The Bible was not developed like that.

To be inspired means the Bible is more than a historical document reflecting the evolution of Christian thought over a ten century time span. Church history does that. Christian theology accomplishes that. The Bible is the Word of God for the people of God. The Bible is the Word of God, for it contains what God wants to say to his people.

Our founder, John Wesley, had a particular notion about inspiration. He believed in double-inspiration. The Spirit of God not only inspired those who wrote it, but continually inspires and supernaturally assists those who read it with earnest prayer.

Claude was a rather normal young adult. One day Claude decided he would read

the Bible from cover to cover. He plowed through the Pentateuch, and found the war stories of Joshua, Judges, Kings and Chronicles to be surprisingly interesting. Then one day, while reading the Psalms, Claude came across Psalm 37:21. The verse reads, *“The wicked borrow and do not repay.”* Suddenly, Claude remembered the \$500 he had borrowed from his parents and promised to repay, but never did. Convicted by the Scriptures, Claude asked God for forgiveness and wrote a check to his parents. Scripture, said Paul, is presently profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

When I was just a kid I memorized 2 Corinthians 12:9. In that verse, the Lord says to Paul, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* What I did not know then, but have experienced now, is the powerful truth of that statement.

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The word of God is useful for instruction. *“Continue in what you have learned and firmly believe, knowing from whom you have learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ”* (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

From his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois, Timothy would have learned the Torah, read the Prophets and worshiped with the help of the Psalms.

The first words John Wesley tried to read were from the Bible. He was about five years old when his mother, Susanna, saw to it that each day John recited the Lord’s Prayer and memorized some verse of Scripture.

I know we are much more sophisticated now. We have developed better techniques for learning than merely reciting the Bible. But are we any better people? Do our children have a firmer foundation for faith?

These writings are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. *“The Bible contains all things necessary for salvation.”* That is our denominational stance regarding the Bible, taken directly from the Articles of Religion in the Church of England.

What does “all things necessary” mean? It means that you do not have to go looking for salvation anywhere else. Among these stories is a grand story. The grand story is this: God made us. Sin mars us. Jesus saves us. Heaven awaits us.

I love to tell that story;
'tis pleasant to repeat
what seems, each time I tell it,
more wonderfully sweet.

All things necessary for salvation means: the Bible is not all truth on all topics for all time, neither is it a textbook for history, biology, geology or astronomy. It is

not a blueprint for the operation of the Federal Government, and the Bible does not contain a sure-fire diet plan.

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The word of God is open to interpretation. We need to get good at it. There is a great debate going on in Christianity these days about the inerrancy of Scriptures. I think it is a mute discussion. In the first place, the original manuscripts do not exist. More importantly, the moment I say, "The Bible says..." the words are subject to fallibility, for I am fallible. The Bible says, "*For God so loved the world,*" but I suspect there might be as many as 100 different interpretations of that text in the congregation today.

So, all Scripture must be interpreted in light of "tradition, reason and experience," said Wesley. Furthermore, we are good at interpreting parts of the Bible, but not the whole.

For example, Paul says in Romans 10:9 "*That, if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*"

Paul also says in Romans 2:15-16 that, "*Pagans, who have not heard the Word, will be saved by following the law written on their hearts through the grace of Jesus Christ on Judgment Day.*"

Paul goes one step further and asks of the Jews in Romans 11:1 and 11:11, "*Did God reject his own people? By no means! Did they stumble beyond recovery? Not at all!*" God never goes back on his covenant!

Then, Paul asks in Romans 14:10, "*Why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat!*"

The Bible is full of all kinds of literature: history, poetry, parables, commandments, metaphors, hyperboles. We do a lot of damage by interpreting poetry as prose, metaphors as facts and commandments as suggestions.

The story of the Good Samaritan never happened, yet it always happens. The parable of the Prodigal Son never happened, yet it happens in some form in every family. Jesus said it is easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. But, with God, all things are possible.

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The Word of God is made flesh in Christ. "*The Word of God became flesh and made his dwelling among us*" (John 1:14).

Belief in the Bible does not save us. We are saved by the blood of the crucified Jesus Christ, revealed in Scripture. We do not worship the Bible. We worship the God revealed in the Bible. Knowledge of the Bible does not get us into the kingdom of heaven. God alone makes that decision.

So it was that God, in his great wisdom, discovered that no written document could get the job done. Therefore, He sent the "Living Word" into our midst to show us the way. "Christ is the way, the truth and the life."

The primary way we come to know Christ is through the study of the Scriptures.

O make your Church, dear Savior, a lamp of purest gold,
to bear before the nations, your true light of old.
O teach your wandering pilgrims, by this their path to trace,
till clouds and darkness ended, they see you face to face.

Amen.