

The Work of the Word of God in Our Lives

In my most recent series of articles from 2 Timothy 3:16-17, we're looking at a portion of this important letter from the apostle Paul. Paul is writing to Timothy, his child in the faith, as he sits in a Roman jail awaiting execution. As he writes what will come to be his last inspired letter, it's certain that he believes his life to be nearly over (4:6-7). What finds its way into this last letter is Paul's *focus* on the future health and well-being of the church. It's interesting to note that Paul puts a special emphasis throughout this letter on the fact that, no matter what happens in the culture around us, the *word of God must go forth*. Why? Because it's the word that, by God's own design and plan, will transform lives as the Spirit is working in concert with the word. Let's begin our brief look at two verses beginning with verse 16.

Paul says, first of all that, "All scripture is breathed out by God..." Although much has been written about this phrase, we can say at least this much: because of the work of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration of scripture, we can be sure that we have the very words of God. Peter supports this same truth in his second letter when he writes: "...knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:20-21) So, then, *all Scripture* is the word of God. I take 'all scripture' to be inclusive of both the Old and New Testaments—from Genesis to Revelation. Paul goes on to say that the scriptures are "profitable," and he uses a Greek word here that comes from the world of accounting. In other words, the Scriptures—according to God's design—are intended to bring profit or gain to God's people which is the context of our passage. Following this, Paul lists four ways in which the scripture brings profit. First of all, let's look at the fact that the scriptures are profitable for...

—Teaching

Paul wants Timothy to see that God's word must first of all be *revealed to our minds*. The word "teaching" can also be translated "doctrine." This is not merely *helpful information* that we might take or leave at our own whims. This is truly *God's word!* Paul gets at this point in writing to the church at Thessalonica. "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you [who are] believers."

(1 Thess. 2:13) And this is exactly what Paul says in Romans 12:1-2. In order to be kept from being "conformed to this world;" and rather, to be "[being] transformed;" there must be a constant "renewing of our minds" with the teaching of God's word. So, the word is "profitable for teaching." But let me add that, this is not meant to be merely an intellectual exercise.

Mind renewal, by God's grace, will have the effect of changing us from the inside-out. We often make a distinction between the mind and the heart, and this can be helpful in certain ways. And yet, depending on the context, the New Testament scriptures often use the Greek word translated 'heart' to speak of the mind, the will, the emotions, as well as our inner life that we often refer to as the heart. 20th Century Welsh pastor and preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones said that the Greek word translated 'heart' in the New Testament includes "the mind, the will, and the heart. It is the total man." It's not enough that God's word merely and only affects our minds. Therefore, we need to make a distinction between that truth which we only take in intellectually which produces no obvious change in us, versus the truth that, by grace, penetrates our hearts and produces ongoing change in our lives.

We want to continually ask ourselves, "Is God's word getting into my heart and life and rightly affecting my conduct?" (e.g., verse 10) It's important that we connect to healthy churches where we're consistently exposed to the faithful preaching and teaching of God's word. This will impact not only *our* lives personally, but also the lives of others whom we come into contact with. In one form or another we all teach, either formally or informally, as well as by example.

The words of the apostle Paul in Romans 2:21-22 should have a piercing effect on all of us. "... you then who teach others do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery do you commit adultery?" The word must affect us from the inside-out before we can be an example in the lives of those around us. How then does the word go from our minds and address our conduct and thereby bring profit in our lives? First by teaching. Let's look at the *second* area of "profit" that Paul gives us. The word is profitable for...

—Reproof

The word translated "reproof" speaks of the way in which the word, by grace, brings *conviction* into our lives. As we're receiving the preaching and teaching in the life of the church and even in our own private Bible study, the word of God *will ultimately* point to places of sin in our lives where repentance is called for. Does God's word regularly bring conviction? Do we listen carefully to the word and rightly apply it to our lives? 17th century Puritan, David Clarkson, once gave a sermon on the importance of rightly hearing the word preached. He gave an illustration to make his point: "If you were to sail a gulf where millions had drowned from not listening to the captain and only a few escaped, would you not pay attention to the captain?..... The Lord gives us warning beforehand so that we would take heed, listen well, and be saved." For those who've trusted Jesus Christ by faith, we're forgiven, and the Spirit of God is at work in our lives to graciously grow us in holiness and one of those ways is in reproving us through the word. We're in constant need of God's grace for putting to death the sin in our lives and the word does that. God's word by the Spirit rips open our hard hearts, as it were, and softens us as we recognize that we're constantly needing the work of reproof in our lives. God's word does rip open our hard hearts, but not so that we remain in that condition. In my next article from this

series, we'll take a look at how God's word heals us. Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Illinois.