

Teaching #1565 - Sunday, June 3rd, 2012, 10:00 a.m.

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LISTENING TO THE WORD IN FOUR STEPS

2 Timothy 3:13-17 - "...while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. [14] But as for you, *continue in what you have learned* and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [15] and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are *able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*. [16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."

Paul reminds Timothy there was still immense profit to be had from continuing in the Scriptures. Paul was an apostle. Timothy was a pastor. But position isn't what makes for maturity or what guarantees success. It's continuing *"in"* the things we think we already know from God's Word. We all need this reminder because we don't take *new* truths for granted, but *old*. Unfortunately, we do our poorest listening to the oldest, most proven truths. It's very easy for the most basic, most important forces for change to be starved out of their proper place in our lives. So we're immediately reminded that, in the spiritual realm, more potential fruit dies by *neglect* than by outright *rebellion*.

Paul tells Timothy he doesn't need something new. He doesn't need something additional. He only needs to *continue* (that's the verb used) in the Scriptures as he was taught from childhood. And as we jump ahead in this very passage we find that the Scriptures, all by themselves, if faithfully studied and humbly obeyed, are absolutely *competent* to make each of us into a man or woman of God (17). You just can't do better than that.

We're going to start looking at this question: *How do the Scriptures do that in my life?* How do the Scriptures make me strong and free? Do the Scriptures do this for everyone who owns a Bible? Is this an *automatic* process? If not, what are the steps?

Paul says there are essentially *four progressive listening steps*. They are outlined in *four phrases* in **verse 16** - "**All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness....**"

We're going to look at the first of those four steps in this teaching:

1) **THE WORD OF GOD IS PROFITABLE FOR TEACHING**

Some translations have the word *"doctrine."* This is Paul's emphasis. He's not talking about the *manner* of teaching so much as the *content* of teaching. The Word of God is the textbook - the curriculum of the godly life.

If you want to know *God* you must start with knowing His *Word*. In fact, you will know God no better than you know His Word. That's why teaching or doctrine comes at the beginning of Paul's list in the process of Biblical change. True, godliness is *more* than academic knowledge. But it is never *less*. You can't follow what you don't know. You can't obey what you haven't learned.

Paul goes on to explain *why* knowing God is so closely linked to knowing His Word: **2 Timothy 3:16a** - "**All Scripture is breathed out by God...**" This whole idea is expanded more fully by the apostle Peter:

2 Peter 1:19-21 - "**And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, [20] knowing this *first of all*, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.** [God has very specific truth content in His revelation. Truth isn't left to the whims of whatever meaning the *reader* places into the text] [21] **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.**"

Apart from the Word we are left with nothing but human opinions. Apart from the Word we are anchored to standards that float with the whims of public opinion. The church has nothing else to teach but the Word of God. Teaching the Word is not *one* of the things we do. It is *the* thing we do. If you're in a church that doesn't major on teaching the Scriptures, regardless how large or outwardly successful or attractive it is, you're wasting your time.

If your children knew their college or university courses as well as you know the Scriptures would you be happy with their grades? Could they pass and get a job? Would they excel in their field?

Never lose your zest for the Word of God. We all know that David was called a man after God's own heart. But *how did he get that way?* Was he just born lucky? Was he just naturally more spiritually inclined than others? What was it about David that shaped his heart in such a fashion?

Fortunately, we don't have to guess about that. David *tells* us what he used to mold and chisel the shape of God in his heart:

Psalms 19:7-13 - "**The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; [8] the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; [9] the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. [10] More to be desired are they than gold, even**

much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. [11] Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. [12] Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. [13] Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression."

Psalm 119:9-12 - "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. [10] With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! [11] I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. [12] Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes!"

Notice that line from Psalm 119 - "**With my whole heart I seek you!**" Notice the placement of those words right in the center of a passage dealing with the value and beauty of God's Word. I have a feeling that most of us would first of all link up seeking God with passionate worship, or feelings of love and euphoria.

And there certainly is Scriptural motivation and calling to worship God with all our hearts. But when David thought about **seeking God** with his whole heart, he didn't think about something **subjective** (like the feelings and emotions of worship), but something **objective** (the actual study and memorization of Scripture).

Here's what I'm saying. When you want your life changed, know what to do **first**. When you think about having your life transformed - changed - you have to immediately ask, "**Changed into what?**" What is going to be the standard? How will you know you are changing for the better? What expert will you listen to?

You will never treasure the Word as you should until you recognize what it is. "**All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable...**" (2 Timothy 3:16a). This is what makes it profitable for teaching and doctrine.

Let me suggest some simple steps to receiving the most from the teaching of the Word, either in corporate settings, or your private devotional study:

a) **To produce Biblical change I must give the Word adequate study time in proportion to the time given to other pursuits.**

Ideas don't just **enter** your mind. They **compete** for space. It's not enough just to say, "Yes, I read God's Word regularly." If your regular study of the Word is so insignificant when balanced with the energy and concentration you apply to other areas, the Word won't have the power you want it to have in your heart.

We've already studied this. Jesus talked about this very issue in the parable of the soils: **Matthew 13:22** - "**As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.**"

Notice those last three words - "**...it proves unfruitful.**" Isn't this God's inspired Word? How can it possibly be unfruitful? Its unfruitfulness wasn't due to any lack in its **potential**. The unfruitfulness came from the **competition** of other things that were given greater emphasis in the mind.

Please remember - I need not only to study the Word regularly. I need to give it enough **emphasis** to dominate the competing objects of attention and affection in my mind. Give the Word enough time and space to have it **rinse** your mind of competing opinions and affections. Give the Word enough time to **overtake** and **counter-balance** the pull and influence of the world.

b) **To produce Biblical change I must humbly and wholeheartedly agree with what it says about my life.**

For the teaching of the Word to have impact and transforming power, it must transmit more to my heart than mere **information**. This is so important. I can't study the Word like I study European history. True, I must **learn** the doctrines of the Word, but I must learn them at a **different level** than the detached collecting of factual data.

The Holy Spirit won't render the transforming power of the Word to the merely curious. The power of the Word dries up to those who study it without a humble intention to **agree** with its verdicts and judgements.

Perhaps James best described this powerless reception of the Word: **James 1:5-8** - "**If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. [6] But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. [7] For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; [8] he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.**"

James deals with a very practical issue. Someone needs wisdom - perhaps to face some major crisis in life. But he can't approach God with a double mind (8). That is, he can't approach God, either in prayer, or in the Word, if he's not sure yet whether or not he will do what God tells him to do. That's what double minded means. He's not yet **committed** to carrying out God's will when he receives it. James says that man can't receive from the Lord with that kind of divided heart.

Then, in typically practical fashion, James offers some wisdom specifically on receiving maximum spiritual benefit from the study of the scriptures:

James 1:21-25 - "Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. [22] But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. [23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. [25] But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."

The phrase that ought to jump out is, "...receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (21). There is no lack of power in the Word. It is able to accomplish its purpose in my life. But only if it's taken into a humble heart. There must be no **arguing** with its precepts.

One of the common ways we argue with the Word is by refusing to set aside sins the Word says must be set aside - **James 1:21** - "...Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." In other words, many people receive nothing from the Word, not because they don't **take up the word**, but because they refuse to **put down their sins**.

Another way we argue with the Word is by saying we just **can't** do things the Word says we **can**:

- * **"I've tried to forsake that sin before and I know I just can't do it!" 1 Peter 4:1-2** - "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, [2] so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God."
- * **"My trials and testings are more than I can bear. I'm only human, you know." 1 Corinthians 10:13** - "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."
- * **"You just don't understand my nature. I can't help worrying about things. It's just the way I was raised." Philippians 4:6-7** - "...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

These are just a few quick examples. If you want the Word to accomplish its high purpose in your life you must receive it with humility. You must **agree** with its verdicts and judgements.

c) **To produce Biblical change I must immediately apply the Word to all my activities.**

James 1:22-25 - "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. [23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. [25] But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."

Even Biblical truth, unapplied, is powerless. Just as knowing about soap won't make you physically clean, knowing the Bible won't make you holy. Soap must be **used**. The Scriptures must be **obeyed**.

Jesus placed application right at the core of the discipling mission of the church:

Matthew 28:18-20 - "And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you**. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Notice, "**teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...**" People aren't disciples until they **observe** what Jesus commands. They aren't disciples because they **know** what Jesus commands. God will never grade you on merely **knowing** the commands. His will only generates life and joy and hope and peace for those who **observe** what the Word says.

Moses put this concept right at the heart of raising children to obey God:

Deuteronomy 6:5-9 - "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. [6] And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. [7] You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. [8] You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. [9] You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

This is the central role of Godly parents. Christian Education workers can do their very best to put Biblical truths on the blackboard. But parents model them when they lie down, when they rise up, when they walk along the way. Again, right from the beginning, the idea is demonstrated **application** of the Word to life.

So the first step in the process of Biblical change is **teaching**. It's a life-long passion. The potential of God's Word is as infinite as God Himself is infinite because He's the One who breathed Scripture out. Give enough time to receiving it to develop a **taste** for it. Until Jesus returns you never graduate from feeding on it's truth.