

THE BOOK - HOW WE GOT IT AND HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF IT - Part ten

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HOW GOD'S WORD DOES ITS WORK (continued)

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."

We saw in our last message that Paul wanted to remind Timothy that there was still immense profit to be had from continuing in the Scriptures. We all need this reminder because we don't take **new** truths for granted, but **old**. It's very easy for the most basic, most important forces for change to be starved out of their proper place in our lives. Remember, in the spiritual realm, more things die by **neglect** than by **rebellion**.

In fact, when you **see** what looks like flat-out, random rebellion to the Spirit of God in **any** Christian's life, know that you're observing, at that specific moment of rebellion, only the **outward fruit** of the **neglect** of inward spiritual strength and light and wisdom that would have kept the heart tender and the life on track. Spiritual neglect is never **immediately visible** in its consequences. The results of the neglect of truth **accumulate silently over time and rupture in rebellion and hard-heartedness**.

So Paul tells Timothy he doesn't need something new. He doesn't need something additional. He only needs to continue 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 **adequate** to make each of us into a man or woman of God (17). You just can't do better than that.

Jesus said the very same thing: **John 8:31-32** - "So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, [32] and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Today we're going to start looking at this question: **How do the Scriptures do that in my life?** How do the Scriptures make me 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 steps** in producing Biblical change. 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 step in this process today:

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 probably 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. You can't follow what you don't know. You can't obey what you haven't learned. You'll end up living your life under the tyranny of being torn in million different directions, in fits and starts, the victim of your own changing impulses and emotional states.

Paul explains **why** knowing God is so closely linked to knowing His Word: **2 Timothy 3:16a** - "All Scripture is **breathed out by God....**" And this whole idea is so important that the New Testament expands it out in even more detail. Here's Peter's take: **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. [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.

I saw a web site promoting a brand new church. It's another in the long line of churches for those who have given up on traditional church. Among the selling points were, **"a relaxed, come-as-you-are atmosphere," "great contemporary music," "drama,"** and always a **"brief talk on relevant life topics."**

It's designed to sound inviting. But there is a small problem. It won't manifest itself for a generation or two but there will be consequences down the road. You and I can't live on **"brief talks."** What we really need is a fresh zeal to study the deep truths for the Word of God.

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:

Psalm 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. This is so important. It reveals a titanic shift in how today's church thinks it can best make approach to God.

Now, 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.**

It's the **second** part of that sentence that matters most. 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.

Jesus talked about this very issue a great deal: **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.**" This is religious emptiness revealing itself over **time**. 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 with 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 affections. Give the Word enough time to **overtake** and **overrule** 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 should and must **learn** the doctrines of the Word, but I must learn them at a **different level** than the detached collecting of 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 heart. He's trying to yield to two opposing worlds at once.

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....**" (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**.

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**.

But there more here. When people fail to humbly obey the Word of God **why** do they usually fail? James says it's usually **not** because they were just bent on rebellion. They don't consciously **choose** to rebel. But they turn from the Word too quickly - **before** they've made definite **closure** with the Holy Spirit to do what He says. And the **result** - perhaps unintended - of this **procrastination** is always **forgetfulness**, which breeds spiritual **neglect**.

We have to constantly fight against this in the church. In fact, Jesus identified this ongoing spiritual battle right in the great commission. 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. We all sit under these great words every time a baby is dedicated in our church: **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**. Follow these steps and then you'll start to see the fruit of righteousness grow faster than you expected!