

The Power of the Scriptures

*“For this cause
also thank we God
without ceasing,
because, when ye
received the word
of God which ye
heard of us, ye
received it not as
the word of men,
but as it is in
truth, the word of
God, which
effectually worketh
also in you that
believe.”
—I Thessalonians
2:13*

IN THIS FINAL INSTALL-ment of the lesson series entitled “Searching the Scriptures,” we will examine the all-encompassing power of the Scriptures as they profess God’s wonderful plan of the ages in simplicity and in truth. It is this “word of God,” as stated in our opening text, that we daily thank him for, and which we desire to have “effectually” work in all those who have implicit faith and trust in its testimony.

The written Word of God in Paul’s day consisted largely of the Old Testament scriptures. Then came the Gospels of the New Testament, the Book of Acts, the various letters written by the apostles, and the Book of Revelation. The apostles leaned heavily on the Old Testament scriptures in

their teachings, but since they were inspired servants of God, their teachings could also be considered the Word of God. The only exceptions were in those rare instances where they explained that they were not speaking by divine inspiration, as in the case of Paul and his advice on the subject of marriage.

Jesus said to his Heavenly Father, concerning his immediate disciples, “I have given them thy word,” and he prayed, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (John 17:14,17) Thereafter, these statements by the Master applied to all his faithful followers—those who would believe on him through his own words and the words of the apostles. All these true followers of the Master have come under the sanctifying power of the Truth, or, to again use Paul’s language, it has worked “effectually” in all who have believed.

THE PSALMIST’S TESTIMONY

The psalmist wrote, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” “I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.” “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”—Ps. 119:11,14-16,105

Notice that in these various quotations the Word, or testimony, of God is shown to be active in the hearts and lives of those who sincerely believe it and love it. It is a cleansing and a strengthening influence. It is a light to guide us in our walk in the narrow way. As our theme text indicates, it works

in the hearts of all true believers.

David also wrote, “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear [reverence] of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.”—Ps. 19:7-11

“Who can understand his errors?” David asks. The obvious answer is, no one, except as he is guided by the Word of God, enlightened to know his will, and strengthened to do it. “Cleanse thou me from secret faults,” he continues. This cleansing is accomplished by the power of the Word of God. We can only know of our secret faults as they are revealed to us by the Word.—vs. 12

Having our secret faults revealed will help keep us from “presumptuous sins,” and we will pray, “Let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.” (vss. 13,14) If our hearts are pure and sincere before God, the truth of his Word as found in the Scriptures will indeed be a power in our lives to cleanse us and to set us apart to the doing of his

holy will.

NOT THE TRADITIONS OF MEN

The religious ruling class in Israel was not wholly satisfied with the truth of God's Word, so as time went on many traditions of men were added. At first, these traditions were passed on from one to another by word of mouth, but later put into written form and called the Talmud. Likewise, down through the ages, there has always been a tendency for many of the Lord's people to substitute the teachings of men for the simplicity of the word of God—the Scriptures.

Blessed are those true servants of God who rejoice in the privilege of helping their brethren understand the Word of God more clearly as they progress in the pathway of the just, which is as a shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day. (Prov. 4:18) This is a blessed service, but may we never attempt to set forth our own teachings unsupported by the Word of God. This is what has happened many times, and has largely accounted for the promulgation of many false doctrines and other teachings not supported by the Scriptures.

Paul admonished Timothy, "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou has learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (II Tim. 3:14,15) Timothy had been greatly favored by God, since from childhood he had known the Scriptures, and Paul admonishes him to con-

tinue in the things he had learned from God's Word. Paul had pointed out to Timothy from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah of promise, and the Redeemer and Savior of the world, and he wanted his "son" to continue in this knowledge because he had proven it to be supported by the Word of God.

While in prison in Rome, and expecting to be executed soon, Paul continued his letter to Timothy, saying, "All Scripture, divinely inspired, is indeed profitable for Teaching, for Conviction, for Correction, for that Discipline which is in Righteousness; so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly fitted for Every good Work." (II Tim. 3:16,17, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) The emphasis here is on the divinely inspired Scriptures. It is these which are to be understood and appreciated by those who are seeking to know and to do God's will. To such, the enduring power of the Scriptures is evident by the many "profitable" benefits Paul says result from our consideration of them.

PROFITABLE FOR "TEACHING"

The inspired Scriptures are profitable for "Teaching." We are not to teach the traditions of men which are unsupported by the Word of God. We are not to teach our own opinions unless they are thoughts which have become ours because we found them supported by the Word of God. Paul was very definite on this point—so definite that in others of his epistles he wrote that even if "an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel" than the "gospel of Christ," which is "the power of God unto salvation," it was not to be believed, and the

one who did this was not to be considered a servant of the Lord.—Gal. 1:8; Rom. 1:16

Paul again wrote to Timothy instructing him to “Charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith.” (I Tim. 1:3,4) It is not clear just what Paul refers to as “endless genealogies,” but it was a subject of discussion which undoubtedly had little bearing on the Gospel of Christ. It raised questions more than answering them, and was unprofitable for the furthering of true Christian fellowship, which would build them up in the most holy faith.

Indeed, how easy it is to indulge in speculations concerning matters which do not concern our relationship to God, or to each other as brethren in Christ. The fundamental teachings of God’s plan, however, are not based on speculation, or mere philosophy, but upon the teachings of the Scriptures. Even the manner of Christ’s Second Presence, and the signs which establish the fact of his return, are clearly and definitely set forth in the inspired Word of God.

It is very important to note the main topics of the Truth which were set forth by Jesus and the apostles. They are our guides in the narrow way, as we follow in the footsteps of Jesus. They are the inspired interpreters of the Old Testament scriptures. Thus they are our guides with respect to God’s plan as set forth in the entire Bible. In our fellowship and in our ministry, we can do no better than to follow these inspired guides. Should there be a difference of opinion, or we are uncertain in

our own minds as to what the proper understanding might be on any given subject, let us consult Jesus and the apostles. If they have not spoken on the matter at all, we might well ask ourselves how important it is to our spiritual growth as New Creatures in Christ Jesus.

In presenting this viewpoint, it is with the realization that in reality the whole plan of God was presented in the Old Testament, but remained hidden until the meaning was revealed by Jesus and the apostles. The purpose of the creation of Adam and his fall into sin and death are given their proper setting in the New Testament, where Paul showed us how "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."—I Cor. 15:22

God's oath-bound promise to Abraham is also explained in the New Testament, where we are informed that Christ is the seed of Abraham, which will bless all the families of the earth, and that as many as have been baptized into Christ are included in that seed, and therefore are "heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:8,16,27-29) Likewise, the purpose of the Law Covenant, and the typical meaning of the Tabernacle and its services, are set forth in the New Testament.

The prophet Micah, in foretelling the birth of Jesus, wrote of him, "Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." (Mic. 5:2) No one could understand the real meaning of this prophecy until the New Testament revealed the truth concerning the prehuman existence of Jesus as the "Logos," the Word of God.

The death of Jesus as man's Redeemer was foretold in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, and

elsewhere in the Old Testament, but these wonderful prophecies and promises were not understood until the ransom feature of God's plan was brought to light by Jesus and the apostles. The prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the "day of the Lord"—the day of his wrath—were shrouded in mystery until light was thrown upon them by Jesus and the apostles. Now we can understand that these prophecies were descriptive of events in the world at this end of the age, during the period of Christ's Second Presence.

Think of all the wonderful promises of the restoration of health and life on earth, and the resurrection of the dead which are recorded in the Old Testament. Peter gave the key to the meaning of these promises by his reference to "the times of restitution of all things," and said that this future time of blessing, following the current period of trouble, had been foretold by the mouth of all God's holy prophets since the world began.—Acts 3:20,21

In the last verse of the prophecy of Obadiah, he speaks of "saviours" (plural) who will come up on Mount Zion, when "the kingdom shall be the LORD'S." This is one of the veiled references in the Old Testament to the fact that the Messiah would have associates in the work of the kingdom. Paul explained this, saying, "The body [or Christ] is not one member, but many." (I Cor. 12:14) In the New Testament, this glorious truth opens to our minds that grand and glorious heavenly calling of the footstep followers of Christ. It is referred to as the "mystery," hidden from ages and generations, but now "made manifest to his saints."—Col. 1:26,27

We could continue to go from point to point and note the manner in which the New Testament interprets the Old Testament, and actually makes it for us the living Word of God. The understanding of God's plan of salvation, the Gospel of Christ, which has come to us through Jesus and the apostles, enables us to turn back to the Old Testament and read much of it almost as though we had always understood it. Think how meaningless most of it would be, however, without a knowledge of God's plan.

True, there are many precious devotional truths set forth in the Old Testament which have been an inspiration and blessing to the people of God in all ages. The Book of Psalms contains many of these precious gems of comforting truths, assuring us of God's help in times of need—of his guidance, of his tender care, and of his willingness to forgive. Jesus and the apostles drew heavily upon these precious promises, and so should we. How wonderful it is to realize that God will "give strength unto his people," that he will "bless his people with peace."—Ps. 29:11

FOR "CONVICTION" AND "CORRECTION"

The *Diaglott* translation says that the inspired Scriptures are also profitable for "Conviction" and "Correction." Our convictions are those things of which we have been assured, or convinced. Our conviction concerning the things of God is that his plan of salvation is the Truth, and therefore the sure foundation of our faith. Such an important conviction cannot stand secure upon the teachings of men, except as those teachings are supported by

the inspired Word of God. Paul was pleased that the Thessalonian brethren understood the matter this way, as stated in our theme text, and had accepted the Gospel as being from God, not from men.

“Correction” is another profitable result of considering the Scriptures. This has to do, for one thing, with developing the character of Christ. By nature, we are all sinners, and imperfect, and from time to time need to be corrected in our conduct. We cannot depend upon our conscience for this correction, except as our conscience is enlightened by the inspired Scriptures. Likewise, we cannot depend upon the advice of our friends—not even the brethren—unless the advice is supported by the Word of God. Not only must our conscience be enlightened by the Bible, but it should be tender, and receptive to every instruction of the Scriptures, if our lives are to be regulated by God through his Word. The Bible speaks of those who “tremble at his word.” (Isa. 66:5) Do we, in reverence and obedience, humbly tremble at the instructions contained in the holy Scriptures?

Not only do the Scriptures correct us in matters of conduct, but also in doctrine. It is easy to get temporarily turned aside from the path of pure truth. We may develop viewpoints of our own, and because we suppose that we have discovered something new and important we hesitate to give it up or put it aside. However, if we are quick to hear the Word of God when its truths are pointed out to us, and are humble before him, we will gladly turn to the truth contained in the Scriptures and continue to rejoice in it.

This does not mean that we should not make progress in our understanding of the Truth. Indeed, we are admonished to grow in grace and in knowledge. As the hymn suggests, the Bible is like a mine, deeper than mortal can ever go; and even though we search for many years, we continue to find additional rich gems of truth. This should be the experience of every dedicated follower of the Master. If we develop the idea that we now know everything and understand every detail of the Truth, and there is nothing more to be learned, this also means we are in need of "Correction."

"DISCIPLINE"

The *Diaglott* translation says that the inspired Scriptures are profitable for "that Discipline which is in Righteousness." The thought of discipline is a little stronger than that of "correction," although it does not necessarily imply punishment. The Word of God does not itself discipline us, for this comes through his overruling providences in our lives. The part God's Word plays in these experiences is to explain their meaning to us.

Hebrews 12:5-8 reads, "Have you forgotten the exhortation which reasons with you as with Sons? 'My Son, slight not the Discipline of the Lord, neither be discouraged when reproved by him; for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines, and he scourges Every Son whom he receives.' If you endure Discipline, God deals with you as with Sons; for is there any Son whom a Father does not discipline? But if you are without Discipline, of which all have become Partakers, then truly you are Spurious, and not Sons."—*WED*

Paul speaks of “that Discipline which is in Righteousness.” Such discipline is in keeping with the righteous character of God, and designed to develop and establish the principles of divine righteousness in the lives of his people. We are all more or less subjected to these disciplines of the Lord. May we, through the Scriptures, recognize their purpose and conform our lives to that purpose.

“COMPLETE”

The *Diaglott* again gives us a clear thought when it says that the inspired Scriptures are given “so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly fitted for Every good Work.” So far as inspired teachings for the man of God are concerned, the Bible is indeed complete. Nothing needs to be added to it. It contains the entire glorious design of the Creator for his earthly creation, including the two salvations—the earthly for the world, and the heavenly for the followers of Jesus. We do not need to look elsewhere for inspired guidance.

God, in his love and overruling providence on our behalf, has provided pastors, teachers, and evangelists for the building up of his people in this most holy faith. Their ministry, too, is limited to the teachings of the inspired Scriptures. It is, in fact, the privilege of every consecrated child of God to encourage one another by gathering together to study his precious Word of Truth.

Think of the blessings which have come to us through those special servants whom God has raised up during this Gospel Age. Their ministries have been a blessing to us because they honored the Scriptures as the only source of divine inspira-

tion for the people of God. They urged all to prove everything they said and wrote by the inspired Word. May we show our appreciation of these faithful servants of the Lord by ourselves honoring the Bible as they did.

Jesus was and is God's greatest gift to his people. We believe it would be proper to say that the inspired Scriptures by which we are sanctified are also a tremendous gift that has come to us from God. Through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, which is also a gift of God, may we continue to show our appreciation for his Word by our faithfulness to it. May we also continue searching the Scriptures, and more fully realize the power contained in them—the "power of God unto salvation."—Rom. 1:16 ■