

The Fellowship Files (2) – A Biblical Foundation

The things we will discuss in this chapter are not meant to be abstract concepts, they are truths meant to be lived out. The thing we have to be careful about when “doing” theology or worship is that we can love thinking about God more than we actually love God, or that we can love loving God more than we actually love God. We seek not only to know what Scripture says, but believe the God it reveals and follow what it teaches. Some things we could discuss, such as how we know which books are in the Bible, how to properly interpret the Bible, and many other important things, are beyond the scope of this course. What we are going to learn are some basics about the truth, power, and sufficiency of Scripture.

One of the primary objectives of pastors and Bible teachers must be to bring the congregation to a place of submission to the Word of God. We are to give a framework for proper biblical thought. Then you can solve problems by introducing a biblical principle that deals with it and conform to the principle. If we don't teach the Word of God and we don't build into our church a submission to the Word of God, when a problem comes and we offer a biblical solution we won't be able to relate to that. We will assume it's just another opinion. We must be committed to a lifelong process of learning His Word (Matthew 28:18-20 / John 8:31-32). Our goal then becomes to grow to maturity in and unto Christ (Ephesians 4:15-16 / 2 Peter 3:18).

We hold the Bible to be true, and to be sufficient. What sort of witness is it when we assure the world that just because we are Christians it doesn't mean we believe what the Bible says? What point is there, indeed, in being a non-Bible-believing “Christian”? Founding our beliefs and practices upon the Bible, and not upon the experiences of a person who claims special knowledge, or who twist the scriptures to suit their false doctrine, this is what distinguishes us from the other religions, cults, and aberrations of true Christianity.

We will cement our biblical foundation in four parts: The Bible is believable, the Bible is understandable, the Bible is powerful, and the Bible is enough.

The Bible is Believable

Experience can lie to you and can deceive you. People think they are special to God because they avoided danger in some fantastic way, or they think that they are on the right path, that everything is going to work out fine, and that they are “going to heaven” or something like that because some supposed supernatural occurrence happened to them, but they take that as above and beyond the Bible in authority. They may even say they believe in Jesus or perhaps speak of some vague notion of God, but when discussing their faith what they talk about is in contradiction to the Scriptures. They are placing their faith in that experience and not in God's Word. Paul tells us plainly that no matter what supernatural things have been revealed to you, no matter how fantastic an experience you have had, if it is not in accordance with the gospel and biblical truth, they are not of God, not to be trusted and can be damning if your faith is in them not the true Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:8).

Scripture is stronger than experience – 2 Peter 1:16-19 – Think about all that Peter had experienced and what he is saying about the Word of God.

- He lived with Jesus for 3 years
- He saw Jesus perform miracles
- He saw Jesus transfigured into a glorious state, and Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:1-9)
- He heard God the Father's audible voice
- Peter had performed miracles himself
- He had preached the Pentecost sermon, relating it all to Scripture
- The Word is as sure as any of that, it is a confirmation of Christ (cf. Luke 16:19-31)
- We would be wise to get it down in us until Jesus rises up out of us

Now look at vs.20-21 – You can't just say, "Well, men wrote it, therefore it must be flawed", because if the claim of the Bible itself is true, God can get men to write what He wants them to. It is not self-refuting to claim that men wrote the very words of God and that it is inerrant. If that is your problem with the Bible, get rid of every book that you have because every single one you have was written by men. You can never trust anything else that you ever read in life.

Historical events aren't observable, measurable and repeatable. You can't use the scientific method to prove that Isaac Newton discovered gravity. So if you actually had a problem with the Bible because you can't apply the scientific method, you have got a problem with history itself. If something is written, the only way you can question it is if you don't have corroboration or there is internal inconsistency. We can't find any internal inconsistency and we have got multiple corroboration. We have got three languages, Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic. We have got three continents, Asia, Africa and Europe. We have over 40 authors most of whom never met one another because they wrote over a period of some 1600 hundred years.

So unless you have anything that would negate what we find in the Bible, you have to accept the fact, based on the evidentiary method, not the scientific method, that the Bible is a reliable collection of historical documents written down by eye witnesses during the lifetime of other eye witnesses. They report to us supernatural events that took place in fulfillment of specific prophecy and claim that their writings are divine rather than human in origin.

Jesus and the Old Testament – Jesus said the OT was about Him (Luke 24:27 / John 5:39). He quotes from every section: the Pentateuch, the Wisdom Literature, the Poetry, the Prophets (both major and minor), and the Historical material. When dealing with the people of His day, whether it was with the disciples or religious rulers, Jesus constantly referred to the OT: Matthew 12:3, 21:16 (citing Psalm 8:2), and 22:31. He confirmed many of the accounts in the OT, such as the destruction of Sodom and the death of Lot's wife (Luke 17:29, 32), the murder of Abel by his brother Cain (Luke 11:51), the calling of Moses (Mark 12:26), the manna given in the wilderness (John 6:31-51), the judgment upon Tyre and Sidon (Matthew 11:21), and many others.

Not only did Jesus confirm the historicity of these accounts, He also authenticated some of the passages that are most disputed today. Many modern scholars do not believe that Moses wrote the first five books of the OT, but Jesus did (see Matthew 19:8, 9; John 7:19; Mark 12:29-31). Some modern scholars also assume the existence of more than one writer of Isaiah, but Jesus believed in only one. In Luke 4:17-21, He cites Isaiah 61:1, 2 (the so-called second Isaiah) while in Matthew 15:7-9 He refers to the first part of Isaiah's work (Isaiah 6:9). The account of Daniel is rejected today by many, but the Lord Jesus believed him to be a prophet (Matthew 24:15). The

account of Adam and Eve often is ridiculed today as legend, but Jesus believed the story to be true (Matthew 19:1-6). Likewise, the narrative of Noah and the great flood not only is authenticated by Jesus (Matthew 24:37), it also is used as an example of His second coming. The account of Jonah and the “whale” is used by Jesus as a sign of His resurrection (Matthew 12:39ff). Matthew 4:1-10 – The devil actually uses Scripture to tempt Jesus (Psalm 91:11-12), but Jesus quotes right back to him: (Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:16, 6:13). Jesus believed in the OT.

Jesus and the New Testament – John 16:12-13 – Some talk as if only the words of Jesus are needed and the words of the Apostles are not necessary, as if the words of Jesus are somehow against the words given by the Holy Spirit to the other biblical writers. Jesus himself dismisses with this idea, Christ said that the Spirit would not only bring all the teachings of Jesus to their remembrance, but that He would also bring new truth and revelation to the Apostles upon His death. The epistles do not confuse the teachings of Christ, they magnify them. Paul declared that “we have the mind of Christ” in accordance with Jesus’ own words (1 Corinthians 2:16). If we want to truly be “red letter Christians” then we ought to pay attention to what those red letters of Jesus have to say about the authority of the apostolic writings. Jesus believed in the NT.

Jesus and KJV only – 1 Peter 1:24-25 (Isaiah 40:8) / Psalm 119:160 – God’s Word endures in some form believers will be able to access from generation to generation. It is not that every single word will be preserved in a certain form, but every concept, principle, law, doctrine.

In Matthew 5:18, when Jesus uses the phrase – “iota or dot (jot and tittle)” this does not mean that we will always be able to point to a single copy and say that every period and paragraph is written exactly the same as in the original. A letter perfect form of God’s Word could not be identified with certainty even in Jesus’ time. Multiple copies already existed, and variations included whole words. Jesus quoted freely from the handmade copies of the Greek version of the OT known as the Septuagint.

Scripture is Trustworthy – we can trust the Bible even if we don’t have the original documents.

The Abundance of Existing Manuscripts – the New Testament is by far the most preserved text of the ancient world, both in terms of the number of existing manuscripts and the time difference between the earliest manuscripts we have and the originals they represent.

The Insignificance of Most Variants – There are many good reasons for a rock solid confidence that 98-99% (not an abstract number) is the same as the original, and even then, it is not that 98-99% percent of the original text exists; it is that more than 100 % exists. We have all the originals say; in that 1-2% that is different, scholars try and find what is likely not original and discard it. It is never mere conjecture. This confidence in the text is shared by people of many theological positions, across conservative/liberal lines, denominational lines, etc.

The Preservation of Primary Doctrines – no major doctrine of the Christian faith is affected in any significant way by any viable textual variant. Those few places where we are not sure never encroach on any issue of major significance, they are doubts on how to spell a few names, word order, differences in style, or confusion concerning synonyms.

It starts with Jesus. Those that don't know God place people first and believe that individual insight into our own selves is more important than God. They weigh their own wisdom in competition to what Jesus said. This leads to pluralism, in other words, choose your own path and it is okay, because the frame of reference is people centered instead of God centered. This is against the Biblical Christian faith, as revealed by Jesus Christ, who said that there was only one way to be justified before God, and that was through Him (John 14:6). Peter said that Jesus was the only way men might be saved (Acts 4:12). Paul told Timothy that there was only one mediator between God and man, that being Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5).

We either believe what Jesus said about Himself and the kingdom of God, and its exclusivity, or we have to invent some other way, which inevitably leads to pluralism (many paths), universalism (all people are saved), pantheism (all is God), or panentheism (everything has God in it). All these things are invalidated by the testimony of the Bible, which Jesus validated as the words of God. So, it is either Jesus or something else, you cannot have both, although many claim a Jesus that is not the Jesus of the Bible.

Jesus said He was God. This is why the Jewish leaders were trying to kill Him in the first place, because He was asserting that He was the Son of God. To the Jewish mind of the day it was clear that Jesus was saying He was equal with God (John 10:24-33). Jesus said to them that if they did not believe He was who He said He was that they would die in their sins, i.e., they were not going to heaven, but would be damned (John 8:24).

Jesus is real, and he really means what he says. Jesus believed the Bible, and so should you, if you want to believe in Jesus. Faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17).

The Bible is Understandable

We don't use something because we don't think it works, or it takes too much effort. People today often complain about how hard it is to interpret and understand Scripture, but we have more teachers and tools than we have ever had. More importantly, we never hear Jesus sympathizing with our frustrations on this point. Instead, whether speaking to scholars or untrained common people, Jesus always placed the blame for misunderstanding any teaching on the reader, on those who misunderstand or fail to accept what is written, never on the Scriptures themselves (Matthew 12:3, 5, 19:4, 21:42, 22:31 / Luke 24:25 / John 3:10).

We must be committed to a lifelong process of learning His Word. Our goal then becomes to grow to maturity in and unto Christ. Scripture contains everything necessary for our spiritual life. It makes the thoughts of God clear not cloudy. It is God's desire for us to abide in His Word.

- 2 Peter 1:3-11 – through the precious promises of Scripture we can know God, and if you apply them to your life you will become fruitful, you will be stable and not stumble
- 2 Peter 1:16-21 – the Bible is believable
- 2 Peter 2 – there are always false teachers who will entice you with false promises and if you listen to them you will become entangled again in the world and enslaved to sin
- 2 Peter 3:1-13 – there will be scoffers who try and steal your stability

2 Peter 3 (14-18) – Scripture is clear to the stable

- Be diligent
- Be patient
- Learn and live the Scriptures
- Be on guard against license (forewarned is forearmed)
- Be growing in grace (true liberty) and knowledge

Scripture is Clear – the perspicuity of Scripture – it is clear & understandable.

What it does NOT mean

1. All scripture is equally clear and easily understood as to its precise meaning
2. Interpretation, explanation, and exposition by a Bible teacher are never necessary
3. Believers will agree universally on every point

What it DOES mean

1. Scripture is clear enough for the simplest person to live by, yet deep enough for the most intellectual and diligent readers
2. Obscurity is the fault of our finite and sinful minds, not a problem with the Bible
3. Interpreters must use ordinary means

Scripture is clear in the essential matters, like the virgin birth of Jesus, the deity of Christ, the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the universal sinfulness of man (Romans 3:23), and justification by faith. The illumination by the Holy Spirit is a major part of the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture. However, we cannot ask the Holy Spirit to replace our intellectual engagement with the text. We need to learn it and believe it (cf. Philippians 3:15-16 / John 7:17). Whenever we depart from the plain and simple meaning of Scripture, interpreted using normal means, we are headed for trouble.

When looking at texts, we can understand them to apply to Christians **universally**, such as Matthew 28:19-20 (go therefore and teach all nations), or to someone or something **specifically**, such as Matthew 10:5-6 (do not go to anyone but the Jews, a command for the disciples only and for that particular time period only, overruled by the Great Commission), or **principally**, such as Philippians 2:3-4 (Paul was speaking to a particular church but the principle of Christlike behavior applies to us) or **not at all**, as with 2 Timothy 4:13 (Paul tells Timothy to bring his papers, which we are obviously not to do). Texts meant specifically may also apply principally, so sometimes texts that aren't teaching on a particular subject may still give us a principle to follow and apply to other matters.

If an essential doctrine seems to be obscure in one place, it will be clear in other places. What the Bible teaches against is looking for esoteric things and clues like Bible codes. These are not mysteries to unlock they are mysteries that are now revealed. We do not need some other book as the “key” to provide a spiritualized meaning to an already clear text. God gave us Scripture to reveal Himself, His works, and His plan and we are not supposed to go wandering off into myths and looking for secret knowledge (cf. 1 Timothy 1:3-4, 4:7, 6:3-5, 11, 20 / 2 Timothy 2:16,23, 3:5, 7-8 / Titus 1:14, 3:9). Any other “revelation” can only be inferior, and if it is not supported by the Bible you don't want it (1 Corinthians 4:6 / Galatians 1:8-9 / 1 John 4:5-6).

The common, unlearned people of Jesus' day were able to understand much of what He was saying (Mark 12:37 / those willing to obey – Matthew 11:25 / Luke 19:48). Even children can learn from and begin to understand the Bible (Deuteronomy 6:6-7 / 2 Timothy 3:14-15). There are even sections that assume that children are in the audience (Ephesians 6:1-3). Most of the NT epistles are written not to church leaders but to entire congregations. Paul encourages the sharing of his letters with other churches (Colossians 4:16). The exhortations to read Scripture publicly also affirm an expectation that ordinary believers in ordinary congregations could understand the Scriptures (1 Timothy 4:13 / John 20:30-31 / 1 John 5:13).

Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not all at once. Understanding Scripture is a process. Further study will lead to further understanding (Joshua 1:8 / Psalm 1:2, 19:7-8, 119:15, 23, 33, 48, 78, 105, 130). Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not without effort (2 Timothy 2:15). Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not without the reader's willingness to obey it (Philippians 3:14-16 / 1 Corinthians 3:1-3). Deeper understanding is given to those who are more mature in their faith (Hebrews 5:14).

Mark 4:15-20 – “Who are we listening to?” We see here that for most it is the false teaching of the world (vs.18-19), the flesh (vs.16-17), and the devil (vs.15) that are doing the talking and being listened to. The world feeds it, the devil enflames it, the flesh indulges it. Where there is no fuel the fire dies out (Proverbs 26:20). What are you fueling your life with? Hebrews 3:12-13 – the deceitfulness of sin is what hardens you into unbelief. We are blinded by sin and not our intellect, we might accept these things in our heads, and deny them in our hearts. Those who listen to God hear His Word, accept it, and it bears fruit (vs.20).

Even an unsaved person can understand the plain teachings of Scripture on an external level. Some might think of 1 Corinthians 2:14: the things of the Spirit are foolish to the man without the Spirit, and he cannot understand them. But 1 Corinthians 2:14 does not mean that unsaved people cannot understand any part of the Bible. The point is that they cannot have a spiritual understanding. They can know the facts but not the spiritual value (Matthew 13:13-15 / cf. James 2:19). The Holy Spirit must illumine the mind of the reader or hearer of Scripture if he is to understand the significance of it. This is the correct meaning of 1 Corinthians 2:14.

This is the reason that although the purpose and plans of God are revealed to us in Scripture, many fail to truly understand them because they have not been born again. Others may know the truth but not apply it to their lives, they live as an atheist regarding certain matters, and they are as the Corinthians were, acting carnally. We can see something but not get it; we can know the truth but not trust it. Even as Christians we need to continue to be disciplined in order to come to a fuller understanding of our life in Christ. You can see it and still not get it. This doesn't mean that there are deep things that only the super spiritual can attain and that we must have gurus to guide us into. No, in that passage Paul is simply contrasting the human wisdom and human mind with the things of God as taught and understood by the empowerment of the Spirit of God, things all Christians have and can grow in the knowledge of (Ephesians 1:15-21).

This does not mean every believer has equal spiritual wisdom, and it does not mean we will understand all spiritual mysteries. It means all Christians can understand the fundamentals of the faith. Many of the deeper things can be understood by most Christians as well, because while it

is a matter of spiritual enlightenment and illumination, Christians can obtain it by obedient study. This is not just study for study's sake, but in order to become obedient to the faith (Romans 16:25-26). The key to understanding in spiritual matters is not intellect, but obedience. God will reveal more truth about Himself as you obey what you know already (cf. John 14:21, 23). Things grow dark to us spiritually when there is something we refuse to do.

In 1 John 2:27 the Apostle was condemning the notion of spiritual gurus, and he was saying that scripture is clearly presented and able to be understood. He was not saying that we don't need teachers at all. He was a teacher himself. Truly the clarity of scripture is an important doctrine, but it doesn't preclude being taught in the Word (Ephesians 4:11-12 / 1 Timothy 3:2 / 2 Timothy 2:2 / Titus 1:9). It means that we don't need to have enlightened masters to initiate us into secret truths. We just need to learn to interpret the Bible like anyone and everyone else can and should. The Bible isn't a secret code for the swami's to solve.

We must all start out as students, and students are not scholars, and even scholars learn and glean from others. When we talk of the doctrine of the clarity of scripture it means that we can understand the most basic and fundamental truths, not that we can all have an easy handle on all things. We do need teachers, and it does take time. It is a big book. You don't have to have a PhD to study and learn and know the Bible, but a teacher can help you understand it more fully.

All Scripture is God breathed so even the narrative portions are for our use (cf. Romans 15:4, 1 Corinthians 10:1-5), although the way we are to use them depends on certain factors. For example, what about those seemingly endless genealogies in the OT books, what are they there for? To the Hebrews, their history and the names of their ancestors represented the salvation of God in their midst. The remembrance and rehearsal of their collective story was a constant reminder of God's promise to Abraham. To remember their past, in an important sense, was to realize that God was in their present, and was part of their future.

Coming out of the Babylonian exile, the reading of these names and the rehearsal of the national history marked the truth that God was still faithful to the covenant made with Abraham. This same emphasis is clear in the NT usages of genealogies. To continue to rehearse the history, and to show Christ as the culmination of it, was to argue that not only was God continuing to fulfill the divine promise made to Abraham, but moreover that God's promise was completed in the person and work of Christ.

So we can see that those lists are very important, but we don't need to try and derive some deeper meaning from them. What the Bible doesn't teach, and teaches against, is looking for esoteric things and clues like Bible codes. These are not mysteries to unlock they are mysteries that are now revealed. We do not need some other book as the "key" to provide a spiritualized meaning to an already clear text. God gave us scripture to reveal Himself, His works, and His plan and we are not supposed to go wandering off into myths and looking for secret knowledge (cf. 1 Timothy 1:3-4, 4:7, 6:3-5, 11, 20 / 2 Timothy 2:16,23, 3:5, 7-8 / Titus 1:14, 3:9).

Here is the point: in essence, spiritually speaking, if the apostles didn't teach it you don't need it, and you definitely don't want it (1 Corinthians 4:6 / Galatians 1:8-9 / 1 John 4:5-6). Since Paul

says that Scripture thoroughly equips we can unequivocally conclude that another revelation can only be inferior.

The NT realizes along with us that we can be lead astray by false teachers, but our own stability is a bulwark against this. We don't have to learn fast, we need to learn well, and we do that by applying the Scriptures, by obedience and trust in the things we are sure of. We get in a good community of Bible saturated believers, and we move and grow in grace (we don't have to be sprinters), and we grow in knowledge (our own mind becomes Bible saturated, Romans 12:1-2). What better could you be spending your time on?

We should be thankful to God who clearly reveals in the Bible how to have one's sins forgiven, how to have eternal life, and how to live a life pleasing to Him. This doctrine is very important because the clarity of Scripture is denied by every false theology, usually putting an elite priesthood, a cult's founder, an inner light, or a false methodology between the Scriptures and the Christian. But you can understand the Bible. We are born again by the will of God (James 1:18), through the Word of God (1 Peter 1:22-25), because of the work of God in Christ (1 Peter 1:18-21). The Bible helps us live for Christ, win others for Christ, and edify our brothers and sisters in Christ. You can learn, live, and love God's Word. You can become trusted counsel for others. You can become stable. You don't have to stumble.

The Bible is Powerful

Hebrews 4:12 – In this verse there are two action verbs, in the present tense. The first verb talks of what the Word is and the second speaks of what the Word does. It can go where it needs to go, to see what it needs to see, to do what it needs to do, so we can be who we need to be.

The first verb is *living* – the Word has the life and power of God in it. The Word of God brings the convicting power of the Lord. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Two other words give us a description of this living.

Active – full of energy, effective (Isaiah 55:9-11). Its effectiveness may not be immediately evident to us, but as we mature we will see it being effective in changing lives and also in hardening hearts. It will perform surgery and bring new life, or it will be the death sentence to the rebel. The Word of God either heals or it hardens, and it never fails to do its intended work.

Sharper – comparative, not just sharp but sharper. In other words, it is not only effective it is precise. It not only gets the job done, it gets it done exactly right. It goes as deep as it needs to, it hits the root. This is what the word of God is; it is living, and therefore effective and precise, and that is why it is able to discern all things.

The second verb is *piercing* – to penetrate – two applications are given to describe it.

The first is *division* – to separate – soul and spirit (spiritual matters), joints and marrow (physical matters). In other words, things that are impossibly hard to divide but that is how penetrating God's Word is, it can and will find out the problem right at the root, no matter how deep it is buried, no matter how many layers it has to separate. Like soul and spirit, the immaterial parts of

man, things we cannot get a hold of, God's Word can. Back when this was written, bone marrow transplants weren't available. But God's Word penetrated as deep as that. The point is that the Word of God lays bare our problem; it exposes it for what it is. It cuts through all the layers of lies and faults and fears and gets to the bottom of it.

The second is discerning – judging – not condemning but ascertaining what is really going on. It is able to see what needs to be done. It gives a critique. The Word gets to the bottom of things and passes judgment on what it finds. A prosecutor presents the facts of the case, but the judge determines what is right and wrong; the Word of God does both. Thoughts and intents: both the feelings of desire and the imaginations of the mind. As we faithfully use the Scriptures we will be trained to discern the wrong ways of thinking that have become fortresses for sin in our lives so that our minds can be renewed and our lives transformed. It finds the root and plants the fruit. This is the surgical power of God's Word. This is what the Word of God does. It identifies the sickness and because it is alive it can give new life. It can change the heart.

Yes, God knows your heart, but the question is does He have your heart? Do you know His heart?

You can't hide, but you shouldn't anyway (the Word exposes where we need to "shave" and "clean", like mirror, but it also cleans us, like a shower).

Scripture is what we need – Scripture contains everything necessary for our spiritual life. It is surer than any experience. It contains divine principles that are the best guide for us. It makes the thoughts of God clear not cloudy. It is perfect and therefore lasts forever. It is true and capable of producing righteousness. Scripture is infinitely more precious than anything this world has to offer. Psalm 19 is a clear testimony to the power of God's Word.

Psalm 19:1-6 – general revelation (in the world)

Psalm 19:7-14 – special revelation (in the Word)

- Vs.7-8 – *attributes* of the Word
 - 7a – Its teaching makes you turn
 - 7b – Its witness makes you wise
 - 8a – Its guidance gives you gladness
 - 8b – Its instruction gives you insight

- Vs.9-11 – *appreciation* of the Word
 - 9-10 – Its nature makes you hungry
 - 11 – Its nurture makes you holy

- Vs.12-14 – *application* of the Word
 - 12-13 – It exposes sin, makes you pray (describes the probing piercing effect)
 - 14 – It evidences salvation, makes you praise

Is He your rock, and your redeemer? Is His Word your daily bread? It can go where it needs to go, to see what it needs to see, to do what it needs to do, so we can be who we need to be.

However, not only can the Word of God, the Bible, minister to you and give you spiritual health and hope, but you can also minister in the power of God. You have a sword, something with the power of God in it, something that can pierce through any pretense, something that can go as deep as any doubt, something that can change any course. We don't have to worry about not having enough power, not enough precision, not enough depth, not enough light. We have the Bible, the Word of God, and God is true to His Word. It can go where it needs to go, to see what it needs to see, to do what it needs to do, so we can be who we need to be.

The Bible is Enough

2 Timothy 3:14-4:4 – We need to recognize the authority, finality, and sufficiency of Scripture. Paul told Timothy about these things, and said that difficult days were ahead (3:1-9). Paul wouldn't be there personally to lead and guide him (4:6-9). So what would Timothy have to guide him? He would have the teaching Paul gave him, and the life which underscored that teaching (3:10-13). He would have the grounding in Scripture that his believing grandmother and mother had given him from infancy (3:14-15, cf. 1:5). Paul insists that this would be sufficient to make him wise. He needed to lead the church and find others who would follow his lead and teach others (2 Timothy 1:13, 2:2, 15, 1 Timothy 4:13-16).

Then, in vs.16-17 Paul speaks of *all* Scripture. Now some might say that in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 Paul was referring only to the OT, but that isn't true, because most of the scriptures were already complete. Peter brings the OT and NT together by saying that words of the Apostles were also authoritative (2 Peter 3:2), specifically referring to Paul's writings as scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16). Paul uses the term he used earlier in 1 Timothy 5:18, where he quotes Luke 10:7 (Deuteronomy 25:4), so the gospels are included. Timothy would have had access to these writings (2 Timothy 4:13). Paul is saying that the Word of God, including the Old Testament retrospectively and the New Testament prospectively, including his own writing (1 Thessalonians 2:13) represents the very words of God, and thus tells us everything we need to understand in order to know and serve God (cf. 2 Peter 1:3-4).

He tells Timothy that since he has the Word, the very thing needed to fulfill his ministry, he must endeavor to always "preach the word", which, by looking at the context, clearly means the inscripturated word. Paul warns Timothy to contend for the faith (cf. Jude 3) because others will become bored with the Bible and seek to hear new things. Many back then and today look for words from outside the Word (cf. Colossians 2:18 / Isaiah 8:20 / 1 John 4:5-6). That is why we are to judge their message by the standard of the Word that has already been given (cf. Acts 17:11). No new words are being given, we have all we need; otherwise the Bible isn't what it says it is, and it claims to be sufficient for every good work.

When people don't get rooted and grounded in Scripture, and when they do not have their foundation for faith and practice established, they will use the Bible like a magic book, or an encyclopedia. They will become hard of hearing and ignorant of the truth, all the while thinking that they believe the Bible, but they will incorporate compromise into their understanding by seeing the Scriptures through the lens of their life, instead of seeing their life through the lens of Scripture. They twist the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16-18). It is time to get rooted, grounded, established, it is time to grow up; enough is enough.

There are many who might agree with all that has been said here, but who nevertheless do not understand the need and the urgency for true Biblical understanding and true preaching today. It is easy to understand, however, in a church world that is bored with the Bible, downplays doctrine, and puts down preaching, that we can get very discouraged very quickly.

It was the same in Timothy's day, and that is why Paul is writing him. Remember that Paul was telling Timothy what he should focus on and why. If you read through both 1 and 2 Timothy, you will see Paul's concern is that Timothy sticks with the work at Ephesus and sticks to the Word of the Scriptures (1 Timothy 1:3-4). We think we aren't Timothy, but he could get just as discouraged as we get.

If you see the outline of what Paul is saying, it becomes apparent that Timothy was having a hard time and that he seemed to want to give it up (2 Timothy 1:6-11), but Paul tells him that this is what ministry often looks like, as it did for him (2 Timothy 1:12-15, 3:10-13). Paul was faithful and fruitful, and sometimes God had men who comforted him (2 Timothy 1:16-18), but at times he was deserted when it came to persecution and prison (2 Timothy 4:16). Paul tells Timothy to keep working with the tools he has been given, that they are enough, we have the ultimate tool, and it can make us the ultimate tool, but it must be used properly (2 Timothy 2:15).

2 Timothy 2:2 – Paul exhorts Timothy to guard what has been entrusted to him, to pass it on down the line, Paul to Timothy to faithful men to others who teach. Paul knows that there will be seasons where people in the professing church will be poisoned (2 Timothy 3:1-9) and false teachers will be promoted (2 Timothy 4:3-4). That is why Paul tells Timothy, and us, the ones who the truth has been passed down to, that the priority is always on the preaching of the Word (2 Timothy 4:1-2), whether people seem to be listening or not. The need for true preaching is as important today as ever, and the world, the flesh, and the devil are against it as much as ever.

When we are tempted to give in, and try the new fads and frauds of the so called church today, when we aren't seeing as much supposed fruit as the other guy who is doing other things, we need to stay with the Scriptures. When we are tempted to give up, we need to remember what Paul told Timothy. The Bible is enough, so preach it, and believe it. We have the ultimate tool but if we don't use it rightly we can become the ultimate fool.