

Foundations Lesson #1

The Word of God, Part 1

The Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, are verbally inspired by God and are the revelation of God to man. They are our infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct. It is therefore most important that we search out God's word daily – reading it, obeying it, meditating upon it, and relying on it – as our source of inspiration, guidance, and power to live a godly life.

The Bible is God's book. It's what he's written for us. We know that it's true and reliable because he is true and reliable. There are many things God has spoken by his voice, but there are certain things that God considered so important that he memorialized them for us by putting them into writing. They're the foundation for everything we believe and do. They provide an anchor for us in all the uncertainties of life.

The Bible can be thought of as the manufacturer's handbook of life. When you buy a larger item, you usually get a handbook with it – a document written by those who've made the item, telling you how it works, what you can do with it and what you can't do with it, what it's designed to do and what it is not designed to do, how to service the item, and so on. Those people who handle their purchase according to what's written in the manufacturer's handbook usually get the most and longest benefit from that item. Since God is the creator of all things, he knows best how every part of his creation functions to its maximum potential – what it was designed to do and what it wasn't designed to do, what'll cause it to function well and what'll cause it to be ruined, and so on. If we humbly accept the truth that God knows far more about life than we do, and that his instructions to us on how to live are far better than anything we can come up with, then we'll have the proper attitude in reading his word to gain the wisdom, the knowledge, and the understanding we desperately need in order to handle life properly, the way it was designed to be lived by **The Creator** himself.

We would also do well to understand God's purpose in providing us humans with a written document. God longs to be close to you, me, and every other human he's created. His word gives us truths, illustrations, stories, parables, and other kinds of writing that reveal not only His great love for us, but also what we need to believe, to do, and to understand in order to be close to him.

If one of us were to receive a handwritten note from the prime minister of Great Britain, or the emperor of Japan or the president of the United States inviting us to be their close personal friend, we'd probably feel highly honored, and we might do some research to find out about them, so that we could talk to them and relate to them more appropriately. That'll probably never happen to most of us, but what we have received is far better. The all-powerful, all-wise, all-loving, all-knowing Creator of the universe has invited us into an intimate relationship with himself. There's no greater honor we could ever receive than that. Then, to top it all off, he's already provided a written document that tells us about what causes him pleasure or grief, what's important to him, what he expects from us, how he interacts with humans, and so on. We would have **no idea** how to live in order to please God unless God had revealed that to us. So, graciously, he's provided his word to meet that huge need.

So, let's go to Roman Numeral number one on our outline. The Bible is God's word. One author has said this,

QUOTE #1

The oneness or unity of the Bible is a miracle. It is a library of 66 books, written by over 35 different authors, in a period of approximately 1,500 years. Represented in the authors is a cross section of humanity – educated and uneducated, including kings, fishermen, public officials, farmers, teachers and physicians. Included in the subjects are religion, history, law, science, poetry, drama, biography and prophecy. Yet its various parts are as harmoniously united as the parts that make up the human body.

For 35 authors, with such varied backgrounds, to write on so many subjects, over such a long time span in absolute harmony is a virtual mathematical impossibility. It just plain couldn't happen. Then how do we account for the unity of the Bible? The only adequate

explanation is that “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

...and that leads us to the first point on our outline, the Bible was written by God the Holy Spirit. If you'll notice on the outline just beneath “The Bible was written by God the Holy Spirit” there's a Roman Numeral two, “Timothy”, the number three followed by a colon, and then the number sixteen. I'd like to take out just a minute to explain what all that means. If you turn to the table of contents in your Bible, you'll see that it's divided into two sections. The first section is called the Old Testament; the second is called the New Testament. If you look at the first entry under the Old Testament, it should say, “Genesis,” followed by “Exodus,” “Leviticus,” “Numbers,” and so on. These are called books of the Bible. So the Bible contains a total of 66 books, 39 of which are a part of the Old Testament, which starts with the book of Genesis and goes through to the book of Malachi. Then the remaining 27 books of the Bible make up the New Testament, which starts with the book of Matthew and goes through to the book of Revelation. If you find the 16th book of the New Testament, you'll see that it's called “II Timothy.” If you turn to the book of II Timothy in your Bible, you'll see that it has four chapters. Chapter numbers can be larger bold numbers flush with the left margin of the text or they can have their own heading, depending on how the editors of your particular Bible decided to print them. Then, the text of each chapter has very small numbers, in order, interspersed throughout it, which are called verse numbers. So going back to the entry on our outline, “Timothy” with a Roman Numeral two in front of it, refers to the book of Second Timothy. Then the number to the left of the colon refers to the chapter, in this case, chapter three, and the number to the right of the colon refers to the verse, in this case, verse 16. So if you find II Timothy 3:16, it should read something like this:

2Ti. 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

Now if your Bible doesn't say exactly the same thing, don't worry about it. When the Apostle Paul wrote the book of II Timothy back in somewhere around the year A.D. 63, he didn't write it in English as you can imagine. He wrote it in an ancient Greek called *Koine* Greek. So for hundreds of years many people have undertaken the job of learning *Koine* Greek just so that they could translate the writings of the New Testament into languages people use on an everyday basis. I, for one, am very grateful for their work. In the English language, we're blessed to have dozens of translations of the sacred Scripture, but we have to understand that no two translators think exactly alike, so there will be some variation in the English words used. Bible translation is, after all, highly complex work. By the way, the vast majority of the Old Testament was written in ancient Hebrew; the vast majority of the New Testament was written in *Koine* Greek, and very small amounts of Aramaic were written in both Old and New Testaments. Also, in the **Additional Resources** section of this web page, you'll find a document that gives the abbreviations that are used on this website for each of the books of the Bible. All the lesson outlines at foundationsofthefaith.org have the Bible books written out, but many of the other available documents contain abbreviations.

Going back to II Timothy 3:16, the truth of this verse is clear. All Scripture (the word “Scripture” simply refers to the text of the Bible) is God-breathed. It's been breathed, authored, or inspired by God the Holy Spirit. Now every book of the Bible has one or more human authors, but this verse gives us the greater reality of what was happening as they were writing. God was breathing upon them, inspiring them, so that the words they ended up writing were exactly what God wanted to say. Isn't it exciting to know that the great and awesome God of the universe chooses to do some of his work by flowing through human beings? If you've surrendered your life to God by accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, God would even like to do some of that through **you**. But we'll get into that more in future lessons.

For now, let's go back to our outline and look at the next Scripture reference.

2Pt. 1:20-21 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men

spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

That word for “carried along” is an original Greek word that appears only in a few places in the New Testament. One of them is in the book of Acts, chapter 27, verse 15, which says,

Ac. 27:15 The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along.

So we can envision a violent storm on the Mediterranean Sea, and Luke and the others that were with him on the ship realized that they were powerless to oppose the storm, and so the storm was simply driving the ship along. Wherever the storm wanted the ship to go, that's where the ship went. In the same way, wherever the Holy Spirit wanted these authors of the Scripture to go in their writing, that's where they went. They were carried along, or driven along, by the Holy Spirit. I suspect that most of them had little or no idea that they were actually writing Scripture when they were being carried along by the Holy Spirit, but God is well able to work through any human being without their even being aware of what he's doing through them. Be that as it may, the final result was that the Bible was written by God the Holy Spirit. That's what's important.

We should also be encouraged that for those of us who believe, the author of the Scriptures has taken up residence in our lives, and he, the Holy Spirit, is well able to give us understanding, insight, and illumination into what we're reading. If you'd been alive back in 1610, and you were reading a Shakespearian play – say, King Lear or Romeo and Juliette – and you were having trouble comprehending what the author meant, if you were able to travel to where Shakespeare lived, you could have asked him for the meaning. Since he wrote it, he could explain it. When we're reading the Bible, there's no need to travel to have a meeting with the author. All we have to do is ask. What God has written, he's more than happy to explain, and that's a great benefit to us. And, as we ask him the questions we have, we begin to experience him as our teacher, which is an important aspect of our relationship with him.

So because the Bible was written by the Holy Spirit, the Bible is infallible – which is the next point on our outline. Jesus himself said,

Jn. 10:35 [Jesus speaking] – and the Scripture cannot be broken –

Mt. 5:17-18 [Jesus speaking] “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

These verses also show us God's tremendous watch-care over his word. Nothing will disappear from his word until everything is accomplished. For hundreds of years, the Bible has been the object of great antagonism and persecution. Bibles have been burned by the thousands. Corrupt clergymen have even chained Bibles to their pulpits under the guise of not wanting the common people to “misinterpret” what was written, but actually to hide their own twisting of God's sacred message. Men who translated the Scriptures into the language of the common people were burned at the stake. The blood of many holy men and women has provided us with the access to God's message we enjoy today. But despite all the fierce resistance, the Bible has survived, and it will continue to survive. God's holy book is more readily available today, and in many more languages, than it ever has been in all of human history. There's still an enormous job that needs to be done, but progress continues to be made.

Nu. 23:19 God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

1Sa. 15:29 [Samuel is speaking] He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind."

There are a few things you'll never hear God say. You'll never hear God say, "I didn't mean it." God's words are so full of integrity – because **he** is so full of integrity – that he always says what he means and means what he says. Another thing you'll never hear God say is, "Oops." That's right, "Oops." God is never caught off guard or unaware. Everything that's happening today he knew thousands of years ago would be happening today. And he carefully oversees every detail of it. And, in the Scriptures we just quoted, it's clear that God will never say, "I changed my mind." He's never fickle or haphazard in what he does.

Pr. 30:5 Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

Ps. 12:6 And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times.

I'll admit that there are some things written in Scripture that would **appear** to be contradictory, but in actuality, the words of God are flawless. Let me give you an example. In Matthew's gospel, in the account of the crucifixion, it says that two robbers were crucified with Jesus, and both of them, along with quite a few other people, heaped insults on Jesus. In Luke's gospel, the same scene is described, but Luke records that only one of the criminals crucified with Jesus hurled insults at him. The other turned to Jesus and said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." To that Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

So some people have asked the question, "Which one is the true account? Which one is correct?" The problem with that question is that it's already concluded that one of the accounts must be incorrect, and **that's** where the problem lies. Jesus was crucified at about nine O'clock in the morning. He didn't die on the cross until about three in the afternoon. What if Matthew walked by at 9:15a.m. and witnessed both robbers hurling their insults at Jesus. What if, two and a half hours later, the eyewitnesses that Luke got his information from watched the repentance of one of the criminals who by now had experienced a change of heart? That would mean both accounts are true, they just took place at different times. We have to understand that all Scripture is true. When we come across something that appears to be contradictory, we need to ask ourselves, "What could have happened that makes both of these accounts accurate?" If you can't think of anything, I encourage you to pray and ask God for the answer. He'll let you know how they both work together in perfect harmony. After all, the Bible is his book. He wrote it, and he's more than happy to help any of us understand it.

There's one more verse I want to mention regarding the Bible being infallible.

Am. 3:7 Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.

You can ponder that verse for quite a while, but it tells us that God announces his plans before carrying them out. And that's another way we can appreciate the divine authorship of the Scriptures. In the **Additional Resources** section of this web page, there's a link that opens up a document on Fulfilled Prophecies. You can download it if you like. That document gives 23 of the prophecies about Jesus Christ which were written down as part of Sacred Scripture by about 400 B.C. All the references are written on the document, so you can look them up if you choose to. My point is that God's telling us in advance, with 100% accuracy, what would take place, shows us that he, who is the Beginning and the End, is the author of the Scriptures and that they're completely reliable.

When I was a 20 year-old college student, the fulfilled prophecies of the Bible were an important factor in bringing me to the point where I gave my life to the Lord. Being an atheist at the time, I had no explanation for how something could be written down hundreds of years earlier and then be

precisely fulfilled. Granted, someone could have tried to fulfill **some** of the prophecies, but none of us has any control over where we're going to be born, or if we'll be betrayed – and if so, by whom – and for how much money... You get the picture. Since I couldn't find any other reasonable explanation, I had to conclude that the Bible really did have divine authorship.

Foundations Lesson #1

The Word of God, Part 2

On our outline, Roman Numeral number one says that the Bible is God's word, and underneath that heading are four sections. We're now continuing with the third section, which says that the Bible is God's revelation of himself.

It's important for us to understand that we humans, left to ourselves, would have **no idea** who God is, what he likes, what he doesn't like, or what he might require of us. We're incapable of figuring that out or discovering it on our own. Out of all the man-made religions in the world no two are alike, which shows us exactly how well we've done by ourselves. Fortunately, God has already provided the solution to that problem by **revealing himself** to us. Although God may reveal himself to people in a variety of ways, **the primary way** God has revealed himself is by his written message, the Bible. And because the Bible is infallible, every other experience we may have must be evaluated based on what the Scripture has to say about it.

God hasn't just given us his word so that we can know **about** him, he wants us to know him personally, experientially, and intimately. God hungers, thirsts, and even aches for a close relationship with each human he's created. So our goal in reading the Bible should be to know God and his ways, so that we can live according to what pleases him, and so that we can have a close relationship with him. With the Bible as our guide, the goal of our life should be to please God with every word we speak, with every thought we think, with every choice we make, and with every attitude we have in our hearts. As the Bible itself has said, it's a matter of loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Nothing in life is more important than that. Nothing.

Ro. 16:25-27 Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him – to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Dt. 29:29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

QUOTE #2

The Bible is not a book of philosophy – even though it is philosophical.
The Bible is not a book of history – even though it is historical.
The Bible is not a book of science – even though it is scientific.
The Bible is God's message to us. It reveals Jesus Christ to us. It speaks to our greatest need.

If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator.
If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist.
If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist.
If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer.
But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior.

So we see that more than anything else, the Bible reveals God to us. It's his love letter to his children. Then, next on our outline: The Bible is not to be altered. In other words, no adding or subtracting is allowed. And that only makes sense. God is perfect (Matthew 5:48), so what he's written is perfect. For any of us human beings to think that we're able to improve upon what God has written is sheer arrogance of the deepest and most profound variety. Some people have actually tried to add to or subtract from the Scripture, but anyone who thinks they're qualified to do so needs to repent of their extraordinarily great pride.

Dt. 4:2 Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.

Dt. 12:32 See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it.

Rev. 22:18-19 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

I want to say a few things about our attitude toward the Bible as well, because our attitude can color how we understand God's truth. If someone has a strong conviction that all sidewalks should be purple, and they go to the Bible with the attitude that they know they can prove from God's word that all sidewalks should be purple, they may even find an obscure verse somewhere that leads them to the conclusion that God is on their side, even though the word "sidewalk" doesn't even appear in the Scripture. The issue here is attitude. It's necessary for us to approach God's holy word with humility. We should ask ourselves, "What does it say?", searching it out as people ready to be instructed, ready to learn, ready to soak up what God has said. It would even be a good idea to pray the prayer of Psalm 119, verse 18, which says,

Ps. 119:18 Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

It's also important not to take Scripture out of context. Let me explain what I mean by that. Very few verses in the Bible were written to stand by themselves. So for us to understand most verses properly, we need to know what's been written beforehand and afterward or, put another way, we need to understand the verse in its context. Let me give you a striking example of what can happen when we take a part of the Bible out of its context. Did you know that the Scripture clearly states that there is no God? That's right. Word for word, it says "There is no God." But now let me read you that portion of Scripture in its context.

Ps. 14:1a The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."

I think you can see clearly that there's a drastic change in meaning between when we **are** and when we're **not** faithful to keep that line of God's word in its proper context.

2Ti. 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Amen.

Foundations Lesson #1

The Word of God, Part 3

Roman Numeral number two on our outline says that the Bible is powerful. Jesus used the Word of God to overcome the devil's temptations in the desert. You can read about that in Matthew 4:1-11. In that passage of Scripture, the devil tempted Jesus in three different ways. Each time, Jesus replied by saying, "***It is written.***" He said, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" "It is written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Three temptations were met the same way: "It is written." If Jesus relied on God's word, how much more, then, do **we** need this power! The Scripture compares God's word to a fire,

Jer. 20:9 But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.

a hammer,

Jer. 23:29 "Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"

and a sharp, double-edged sword.

Heb. 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Eph. 6:17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

If you're in a battle where swords are being used, and you have a sharp, double-edged sword at your side, if your enemy doesn't believe that your sword is an effective instrument of warfare, are you going to leave your sword in its scabbard? Are you going to use or not use the weapon at your disposal based on what your enemy believes? Of course not. You are going to use it because it **is** sharp, and it **is** powerful. What the person on the other side of the battle line believes about it is irrelevant. In the same way, when we're battling the kingdom of darkness it's a good idea to speak God's truth, even if those opposing us don't believe in the Bible. Let's remember that God's ability to touch them is not restricted. God is able to use his word to impact their lives even if they don't acknowledge its authority.

God's word is powerful. And so on our outline, we have a list of several things that the power of the word of God can and will accomplish. First, the power to save:

1Pt. 1:23-25a For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.

In the summer of 1978, my father was in the hospital, and I knew that his condition was serious. A friend handed me a Bible and told me that if I believed, I could always pray. As a good atheist, I didn't want to believe and I certainly didn't want to pray, but, like any good debater, I felt it would be a good idea for me at least to be familiar with my opponents' position. So starting in mid-July of that

year, I read that Bible starting at the beginning like you'd any other book, just to see what it said. By the time I got to the book of Daniel in the Old Testament, the vision of the ram and the shaggy goat were a bit too much for me, so I skipped over to the New Testament in late August. On September 26th in my college dormitory, I asked Jesus to come into my life as Lord and Savior. So in just under two and a half months, there was a complete turnaround in my life spiritually. Why? There's power in the word of God. God's word is powerful to save – even atheists!

Next, God's word is powerful to overcome sin.

Ps. 119:11

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

A preacher from California told the story of how he was in a city far away from home teaching at a conference. He got on the motel elevator and pressed the button for the seventh floor, which was where his room was. Just then, two scantily clad young women got on the elevator. Since he was next to the floor buttons, he asked them which floor they would like to get off at. One of them seductively replied, "What about seven?" The preacher later testified that right then, he didn't think of the heartache his family would have to endure if he committed adultery. He didn't even think about how doing such a thing would wreck his ministry. At that moment, the only thing that flooded his mind was the word of God: "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." He told the ladies he wasn't interested. There's power in the word of God to overcome sin.

Then there's power to set us free.

Jn. 8:31-32

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Lies keep us in bondage, but it's the truth of God's word that'll set us free. Some people don't want to hear the truth about their own deficiencies and shortcomings. They would rather believe the lie that they're doing perfectly well than to have to deal with the truth that they need to change. By the way, we all need to change. If we would just accept the truth of what God has to say about our failings as well as our wonderful position in him, we could be set free, because there's power in the word of God to set us free. No addiction, no bondage, no ingrained habit is more powerful than God's message.

Then there's power to nourish us spiritually.

Heb. 5:12-14

In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Here the author of the book of Hebrews is telling his readers: *Hey, you should be growing up faster than you are. You still need milk, not solid food!* The good news is that the Bible has plenty of milk in it for the newborns, plenty of meat for the mature, and all kinds of spiritually nutritious fruits and vegetables to help any of us in any situation that we could possibly find ourselves in. Regardless of where you or I may be in our spiritual development, there's food in God's holy word that will nourish us to grow stronger in Christ, that will bring us closer to him.

Comparing the word of God to food also shows us how badly we're in need of God's message. If our physical bodies don't have food for long enough, we die. But what food is to the body, God's message is to our spirit. If we don't feed on the word of God, we die spiritually, and the spiritual is far more important than the physical. It's a great tragedy that some believers are starving themselves, doing great damage to their spirits, by not feeding on the word of God.

Going on, the word of God has power to produce faith in us.

Ro. 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

After having over 40 years of ministry under my belt, I can tell you that those people I've known who've read their Bibles daily, who accepted the importance of Bible reading and disciplined themselves to do so every day without fail, they had a much stronger faith than those who didn't. In fact, the difference was so clear that it was obvious to any onlooker. Why? Because, as our Scripture declares, faith comes from hearing the message. That's the most important way that our faith comes to us and grows in us. When we read God's sacred word, we hear his message.

Next, God's word has power to equip us.

2Ti. 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

For over 15 seasons I've worked as a professional tax return preparer. I've traveled to many classes and seminars, read many periodicals, took many courses, and studied lots of material in order to be properly equipped to do that job. As believers, our existence has great purpose and we've been called to accomplish much. The verse we just read identifies one of those jobs as doing good works. If we want to be properly equipped for this job, and other jobs as well, knowing the Scripture is essential. The word of God has power to equip us.

Next, the word of God has power to guide.

Ps. 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

This verse refers to someone who's trying to walk when it's dark out, so he needs light in order not to stumble. The comparison being made is that as we walk through this life, we can avoid stumbling because God's word is like a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. We can see where we're going because the Bible gives us guidance.

It's also important for us to know what God has already said, because what God **has said** yesterday will never contradict what he **is saying** today. Because he's the same yesterday, today and forever, his words from yesterday will still be in harmony with his words today. So the better we know his written word – which he spoke yesterday – the better we'll be able to discern what he's speaking today. God is a speaking God, and the words he speaks are pure, holy, and infallible, but our ears are not error free. Knowing the Bible helps keep us on the path of the straight and narrow.

There was a young couple at a large church where I was a member years ago. They were not married, but they were considering living together. So they decided to pray together that if God was not in favor of their living together in an unmarried state, that he would within the next ten minutes, send someone to the door. When no one came to the door within the allotted time, this couple felt they'd received approval from God for their plans. They were in error. God has already said in his word, *But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people* (Ephesians 5:3). There are some matters of guidance we simply don't need to pray about, because God has already made his will on the subject plain in the Scripture.

Then, God's word has power to make us wiser than our teachers.

Ps. 119:99-100 I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.

I hope that you meditate on the word of God and obey its precepts. And because you do, if you then have more insight than your teachers, please do me a favor. Don't boast about it. That wouldn't

help you or anyone else. The Bible says, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." So even though we clearly see the power of the word of God here, let's be humble in the way we implement it.

Next, there's power to see prayer answered.

Jn. 15:7 [Jesus speaking] If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

When we see the word "if" in Scripture, we should pay special attention. Most of God's promises to us are conditional, meaning **if** we do so-and-so, **then** he will do this-and-that. So the key to receiving those blessings is for us to do our part. God is always 100% faithful to do his part, but we have to meet the conditions in order to qualify. So in the verse we've just read, the great promise from the Lord is that we get to ask whatever we wish, and it'll be given to us. That's powerful!! But there's an "if", and it gives two conditions that have to be met: we must remain in him, and his words must remain in us. So when his words remain in us, that helps us be positioned to see our prayer requests answered by the Lord. That's cause for rejoicing!

Going on, God's word has power to accomplish God's purposes.

Is. 55:11 [God speaking] so is my word that goes out from my mouth; It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Several years ago, I got a phone call from a man I'll call Mike. I'd been Mike's pastor for maybe two years, and he'd left our church, and I'd lost track of him. I loved Mike. It was a real joy having him in our church. He was calling from far away, and he wanted to encourage me. He said, "Do you remember when I was leaving your church, and you tried to tell me that it was a mistake? Well I didn't listen to you then, but I want you to know that you were right. I was being stubborn and I paid for it, but God's word doesn't return void; it accomplishes the purpose for which he sent it. I've remembered the things you taught me. I'm serving God today. So don't be discouraged when people don't listen. God knows how to get a hold of them later on. You just keep on doing what you're doing." [pause] When I heard that, I wanted to crawl through the phone line and give the guy the biggest hug I had. Mike was a living testimony that God's word will always accomplish the purpose for which he's sent it. It has the power to do that.

And then, God's word has the power to keep us from error.

Mt. 22:29 [Jesus speaking to the Sadducees] Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.

From this statement of Jesus we can gather that if the Sadducees **had** known the Scriptures and the power of God, they wouldn't have fallen into the error they believed. God's word is truth. Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, prayed with and for his disciples. You can read his prayer in John's gospel chapter 17. In verse 17 of that chapter he prays,

Jn. 17:17 [Jesus praying] Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

God's word is true and reliable, and it has the power to keep us from error. It also has the power to benefit us greatly if we apply it to our lives.

Ps. 19:7-11 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By keeping them there is great reward.

By the way, if you find yourself feeling restricted or burdened by any of the requirements of God, please understand that his commands are not burdensome. I John 5:3 says so. You and I may have to get our feelings to line up with the word of God, but the truth is that the huge benefit we gain by living in harmony with God's desires far outweighs any sacrifice we may have to make along the way.

Then on the outline I just wrote down "and much, much more" so that everyone would be able to see that this is not an exhaustive list, far from it. The more you and I walk with the Lord, the more we'll discover the power in his word. Amen.

Foundations Lesson #1

The Word of God, Part 4

Roman Numeral number three on our outline says that we must absorb the message of the Bible into our lives. Here's the key: the word of God is powerful, but that power isn't going to have an effect on us if we leave our Bibles on the shelf collecting dust. There's a part that belongs to God and there's a part that belongs to us. We cannot do God's part and God will not do our part. God's part is providing his word. He's done that. Our part is absorbing it. God's word is living and active, and if we want it to be alive **in us**, then we have to know it and live it, because the message that is alive in us is the message we are living.

Jeremiah compares this process to the eating of food.

Jer. 15:16 When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty.

Mt. 4:4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Job 23:12 I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread.

Healthy portions of God's word, well chewed and digested, will nourish us to be spiritually strong for every good work in Christ. The purpose in knowing the Bible is that we may better know the God of the Bible. Reading and Studying the Bible is not an end in and of itself. Knowing the Word of God positions us to be able to know the God of the Word. Knowing what God has said helps us to **know him**. The goal is still an intimate **relationship** with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

So with that in mind, let's take a look at our outline and see the first way we can absorb God's message: by reading it.

Eph. 5:10 and find out what pleases the Lord.

Eph. 5:17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

In these verses, we're being commanded to **find out**, to **understand**, what God wants. That takes work, but it's always more than worth it.

A missionary was holding a tent crusade in an African nation. Early in the meetings a man gave his life to Christ. After that, each night, he would be one of the first to be under the tent. He would radiate with the joy of the Lord. He would worship God with passion. This went on for about three

weeks, until one night he came late and his expression was downcast. The missionary went over to ask him what was wrong. The man replied, "It's like there are two village dogs on the inside. One is mean, ugly, and ferocious, but the other is equally determined to win." The missionary asked, "Which one wins?" to which the new convert replied, "the one I feed the most." He who feeds the sinful nature will by that nature reap corruption. But he who feeds the new nature, governed by the Holy Spirit, will reap joy and peace. We choose which nature we feed. When we read the Scriptures, we're feeding the new nature. George Müller has said this:

QUOTE

"The vigor of our spiritual life will be in exact proportion to the place held by the Bible in our life and thoughts... I have read the Bible through 100 times, and always with increasing delight. Each time it seems like a new book to me. Great has been the blessing from consecutive, diligent, daily study. I look upon it as a lost day when I have not had a good time over the Word of God."

For many years, I've been encouraging Christians to read their Bibles through cover-to-cover every year. If you read at regular conversational speed, I understand that reading the Bible for only 13 minutes per day will be enough time to read all of Genesis through Revelation in one year. I also recommend that every believer spend at least 30 minutes per day reading their Bible. I know a businessman who, for about three months a year, had to work 70 to 75 hours a week, yet he still read his Bible for at least 30 minutes per day and he prayed for at least 30 additional minutes per day. He's one of the most solid, committed believers I know. I earnestly ask you to consider: What could possibly be a more important use of time?? Anyone who makes Bible reading and prayer a daily **priority** will never regret it.

Next, it's important to believe what we read.

Jn. 20:31

But these [things Jesus did] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Lk. 24:25-27

He [Jesus] said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

There are people who don't believe that Jesus was born of a virgin. It's **not** that they've carefully studied the Scriptures to find out what God has to say on that subject and then reached a different conclusion from the rest of us. That's not it. Most of them will even freely admit that the Bible is quite clear that Jesus was born of a virgin. So why don't they embrace the doctrine of the virgin birth? Simple. They don't believe what God has written. Their faith doesn't embrace a God who's able to do anything. In Luke's gospel, chapter one and verse thirty-seven, the angel Gabriel says, "For nothing is impossible with God." That's clear, powerful, and comforting. That also means it's **easy** for **The Almighty** to cause a young virgin to be impregnated by the Holy Spirit, so that the resulting baby boy born is the Son of God. Doing that represents absolutely no problem to **The Almighty**. But because some people value their experience – which tells them that such things don't happen – more highly than what God has written, they refuse to believe. That's a huge mistake. When we read the Bible, it's important for us to believe what we're reading. After all, the author is completely trustworthy.

Then we also absorb the message of the Bible into our lives by meditating on it.

Jsh. 1:8

[God speaking to Joshua] Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Ps. 1:1-3 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

Ps. 119:48 I lift up my hands to your commands, which I love, and I meditate on your decrees.

I'd like to be clear about this word meditate. In today's world, there are various kinds of meditation that leave our minds in neutral as we gaze upon who-knows-what, usually in an effort to gain some kind of euphoric experience. But when the Bible refers to meditation, it's not some form of mysticism. The three verses just quoted make it perfectly clear **what** we're to be meditating on: God's law, his commands. In other words, our minds are to be fully engaged and focusing on God's holy message, mulling it over and over like a cow chews its cud, until we've gained more and more understanding and insight as to how we can apply this to our lives, the nature of God that it reveals, the possible purpose for it being there, and so on. When we're at the bus stop waiting for the bus, or in the checkout line at the grocery store, or waiting to be called into the doctor's office, we have a great opportunity to use our time to meditate on God's word.

We'd also do well to study God's word. The priest and scribe Ezra has provided us with a great example of this.

Ezr. 7:10 For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

2Ti. 3:14-15 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Several years ago, I felt the need to study prayer, so I set out to find every passage in the New Testament that dealt with the subject of prayer in one way or another. After three years of study, I managed to find all 183 passages. It wasn't easy and it took a long time, but it was more than worth it! By the way, if **you** want to study prayer in the New Testament, my findings are included in the **Additional Resources** section of Foundations Lesson #2 on Prayer. Feel free to use that material any way you like.

Next on our outline, we can absorb the word of God by memorizing it.

Ps. 119:11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Over and over again in Scripture we see that people were able to quote portions of God's word without looking it up, because they'd committed it to memory; they'd hidden God's word in their heart. As we've mentioned earlier, when Jesus was tempted by the devil in the desert, he was able to resist the devil's temptations by reciting portions of God's word from memory. He didn't whip out his pocket Torah and start reading from the fifth book of Moses. Back then, scrolls and parchment were much, much less common and more expensive than paper is today, so people spent more time and energy on memorization. But if we apply ourselves to memorizing as they did, we can have the same benefit they had.

On our outline, references are given for Peter, Stephen, and Paul, when they recalled God's word from memory as the need arose. I won't read those passages; you can look them up at your convenience. Or, in the **Additional Resources** section of this web page, there's a document entitled "Scriptures & Quotes" where those passages are already printed out for you. But these men in the Bible – Peter, Stephen, and Paul – knew important verses from memory, so when the time came for them to give out those truths, they were able to draw from the storehouse of information they'd

already deposited in their minds and hearts.

Scripture exhorts us to be prepared in season and out of season (II Timothy 4:2). “In season” refers to times that we can prepare for because we know what lies ahead. “Out of season” refers to those situations where we have no idea what’s coming until it’s in front of us. One important way we can be prepared “out of season” is for us to have portions of Scripture memorized, or “hidden in our heart.”

Then, on our outline, the last and most important way we absorb the message of the Bible into our lives is by obeying it. If we don’t obey it, we only hurt ourselves. Mark Twain once quipped that it wasn’t the parts of the Bible he ***didn’t*** understand that gave him trouble; it was the parts of the Bible that he ***did*** understand that gave him trouble. When Jesus said for us to love our enemies and to do good to those who hate us, most people don’t have a problem in the world understanding what he meant. It’s not understanding what he said that gives us a problem, it’s obeying it that gives us a problem. But hearing the message of God does us no good unless we obey it. Listen to what Jesus taught from Matthew chapter 7:

Mt. 7:24-27 [Jesus speaking] “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Jas. 1:23-25 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.

Ps. 119:4 You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed.

Ps. 119:57 You are my portion, O LORD; I have promised to obey your words.

Ps. 119:60 I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands.

I understand that in the movie, “The Ten Commandments,” Moses speaks a line that goes something like this: “You cannot break the law of God. You can only break yourself against the law.” I think what that means is that the law of God is so true, so solid, so righteous, so powerful, that it remains unscathed regardless of what we do. It doesn’t change. It can’t be injured. But if we break the law, we suffer the consequences. We get hurt. We only harm ourselves by breaking the law of God.

So let’s read, believe, meditate on, study, and memorize the word of God. And while we’re doing all that, let’s be careful to obey everything we’re learning. Amen. God bless you all.