

HOW TO HANDLE THE WORD OF GOD

It is a privilege to have the Word of God, ... a privilege that the Church has not always had. In the earliest days of the Old Testament they didn't have a Bible; when they didn't have any written Word of God He spoke to individuals directly.

When the children of Israel were in the wilderness God summoned Moses to the Mount Sinai. There, on the mountain, God gave His servant the Law. The Law included the Ten Commandments and all the various regulations for the proper conduct of God's people. The Law was wholly and absolutely inspired of God.

God also gave directly to Moses the first five books of the Old Testament to write, - the Pentateuch. For centuries, these were the Bible of the Hebrew people. They carried them as they journeyed through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. The Pentateuch included their glorious history of how God called them out and made them to be His own particular people.

As the years proceeded many parchments were written. Some were lost (e.g. Book of Jasher [Josh. 10:13 And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher?](#); Books of the Wars of the Lord, [Num. 21:14 Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the LORD, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon](#)), but there were also many that were preserved and these were preserved by God as a record of His dealings with His people.

The second section in the Old Testament Scriptures is known as the Writings. These include the Psalms and Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes. Most of the authors were kings and priests.

The third section in the Old Testament is the Prophets, - their familiar saying was "Thus saith the Lord". Again, they are best appreciated when you know and understand the historical context in which they were spoken. They brought God's Word during the time when the threat of the invader hung heavily over the children of Israel.

Between the Old and the New Testaments four hundred years elapsed when none of the sixty-six books we include in our Bible were written. However, during this period other books such as Maccabees and Tobit were written (Apocryphal). Then, after this 'silent' 400 year period, by the time the Lord Jesus came to earth, it seems very probable that the books we have in our Old Testament were completely accepted as God's Word ... for, during the times of Jesus the Old Testament books were God's Word. They began with Genesis and finished with II Chronicles ([Mt. 23:35 That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar](#); this was the grandson of Jehoiada, the high priest in the times of Ahaziah and Joash. After Jehoiada died Zacharias boldly condemned both the king and the people for their rebellion against God, which stirred the people up that [II Chron. 24:21 they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the LORD](#)).

Whilst Jesus was on earth records were kept and these were examined and collated to form our four Gospels. Following the Gospels and the Acts *some* of Paul's epistles that were being circulated, as well as the epistles and the writings of other apostles came to be considered as inspired.

Indeed there were many texts and scrolls 'doing the rounds' and at the Councils of Hippo (AD 393) and Carthage (AD 397) the 27 books that now appear in our New Testament were accepted.

Thus the Bible was declared to be complete. Nothing was to be added, and nothing was to be deleted. The sixty-six books were deemed to be the absolute Word of God, in its entirety.

This is the Bible we have, and it is absolutely sufficient, - for it is God's holy Truth from start to finish. It is God's Word; it is to us today what "Thus saith the Lord" was to the children of Israel in the Old Testament, and what the voice of the Saviour was in the Gospels. It has a fantastic history from those ancient days.

Since the Garden of Eden God's Word has been attacked ("Hath God really said?" Gen. 3:1). It continues to be attacked today. Its texts (in the Greek and Hebrew) are questioned as to their historicity. Linguistic scholars argue over complicated hermeneutical strategies; if a verse or word doesn't come up to their standards (regardless of how their standards are arrived at) then the verse or passage is omitted.

However, when the Lord Jesus was walking along the road to Emmaus with the two backslidden disciples the Bible says, [Lk. 24:27](#) *And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.* He considered the Bible to be inspired and He is the example to us that God's Word must be understood on the basis that *it is* God's Word. The Confession of Faith affirms, *The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; ... All religious controversies are to be settled by Scripture, and by Scripture alone. ... In that verdict faith finds its final rest.*

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, [II Cor. 4:1](#) *Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; 2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully.* He wrote in a similar vein to Timothy, [II Tim. 2:15](#) *Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

I believe that second only to salvation by grace, the greatest gift that God has given His people is His Word. Study the history of the Church and you will find that the faithful remnant of God's people has always loved God's Word, and the enemies of God have always hated it! It is usually a good sign that what the enemies of Christ hate, the Christian should love and cherish!

God's Word is a unique gift that He has given and God's people are responsible to hold it as such. It has many descriptions in the Bible, - far more than we have the time to consider this evening ... but here are just a few ...

IT'S A SWORD

- * The first time we read about a sword in the Bible is when the cherubim are guarding the entrance to the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had been expelled; God said to them, "Get out!" ... and it was God's Word that put them out and kept them out.
- * The sword was a powerful instrument in the hands of the one who knew how to use it. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, [Eph. 6:17 take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.](#)
- * It is a powerful weapon, [Heb. 4:12 the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.](#)
- * It's not the cleverness of a preacher that saves souls, - but it is the application by the Holy Spirit of the Word of God.
- * It's a sword, and like any weapon, it needs to be respected. You wouldn't think of taking a gun in your hand if you didn't know how to use it. You need to respect it and be careful in its use.
- * A weapon is intended for *defence*, and it is also used in *offence* ... yes, you need to be able to use it.
- * As Paul said to Timothy, you need to be able to rightly divide the Word of Truth, for fear you handle it deceitfully.
 - * It is a tremendous responsibility any preacher has; I am not here to defend a particular basis of doctrine because I think it is attractive or clever ... I am here to defend and preach a basis of doctrine because I believe it is what the Word of God teaches!
- * Jeremiah had to contend with counterfeit religion, [Jer. 2: 8 The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit ... 5:31 The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?](#)
- * Many Christians handle God's Word with little respect, - they get an idea into their heads and they *use* the Bible and they make the Bible say what they want it to say. It's dangerous folly to work unwisely with such an explosive component as God's Word.

- * It's a sword, it's a weapon, and it needs to be respected as such. I spend many hours of faithful study in God's Word each week and the more you study it, the more you realise the little you know.
 - * Over the years I've seen God's people doing God's Word a great disservice because they do not treat it with the true respect and reverence it deserves.
 - * When someone can 'dot all the I's' and cross all the 't's' you need to watch them with suspicion. You can't take bits out of here and there and built a doctrine upon it ... you must hold to [the whole counsel of God!](#)
- * That is why it is good to read the writings of the men of God whose faithfulness for Him has been tried and tested in the fire of the many centuries of opposition and persecution.

IT'S A LAMP

- * [Ps. 119:105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.](#)
- * It's there for you, so that you don't get lost in the spiritual darkness that surrounds us. There's no excuse!
- * It's not a dim little light, nor even a halogen bulb; it shines even brighter than the light from the lighthouse.
- * It has the Lord Jesus as its *glow*, [I am the Light of the world.](#)
- * In the Old Testament Tabernacle the lamp was to burn always (Ex. 27:20).
- * In the day that the Lord had delivered David from the hand of Saul, he wrote [II Sam. 22:29 thou art my lamp, O LORD: and the LORD will lighten my darkness. 30 For by thee I have run through a troop: by my God have I leaped over a wall.](#) Imagine leaping over a wall in the dark!
- * Jesus told the parable about ten virgins: as they sat outside waiting for the Bridegroom's arrival the thing that distinguished them was who had oil in their lamps and who hadn't.
- * Paul wrote to the Corinthians, [II Cor. 4:6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.](#) And what are we to have in our hearts? [Ps. 119:11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.](#)

IT'S A MAP

- * There's a beautiful verse in Ps. 73:24 Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. 23:2 He leadeth me beside the still waters. 3 ... He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness
- * How many of us have gone through difficult times and God's Word has come to us in a very special way,
 - * Job. 23:10 But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.
 - * Is. 62:10 Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people.
- * There are so many signposts that could attract us in all sorts of directions, - God's Word keeps us on the right path. Sometimes it's difficult to understand the road He takes us along ... but the important thing to keep hold of is that He is on the same road accompanying us.
- * There's a beautiful old German hymn; it was written in 1676,
 - * Whate'er my God ordains is right: His holy will abideth; I will be still whate'er He doth; And follow where He guideth; He is my God; though dark my road, He holds me that I shall not fall: Wherefore to Him I leave it all.
 - * Whate'er my God ordains is right: He never will deceive me; He leads me by the proper path: I know He will not leave me. I take, content, what He hath sent; His hand can turn my griefs away,
And patiently I wait His day.
 - * Whate'er my God ordains is right: His loving thought attends me; No poison can be in the cup That my Physician sends me. My God is true; each morn anew I'll trust His grace unending, My life to Him commending.
 - * Whate'er my God ordains is right: He is my Friend and Father; He suffers naught to do me harm, Though many storms may gather, Now I may know both joy and woe, Some day I shall see clearly That He hath loved me dearly.
 - * Whate'er my God ordains is right: Though now this cup, in drinking, May bitter seem to my faint heart, I take it, all unshrinking. My God is true; each morn anew Sweet comfort yet shall fill my heart, And pain and sorrow shall depart.

- * Whate'er my God ordains is right: Here shall my stand be taken; Though sorrow, need, or death be mine, Yet I am not forsaken. My Father's care is round me there; He holds me that I shall not fall: And so to Him I leave it all.

Conclusion.

- * Indeed, God's Word is a sword, a lamp, a map, ... it's a mirror, it is as seed. It is so personal it reaches into the hearts of the educated and the uneducated, the children and the elderly. It touches the lives of people throughout this world, in all its different languages.
- * It's so vital for it is the *ONLY* Basis of our Faith. I love the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, but it itself is grounded in the Word of God. It sets God's Word apart from the words of men.
- * The doctrine that it presents is Biblical doctrine. It overshadows the writings of the great Reformers (of Luther and Calvin) and the Puritans, Spurgeon and Lloyd-Jones ... but the writings and sermons of these great men are based faithfully and confidently upon God's inerrant Word.
- * Augustine, one of the greatest influences outside of the Biblical saints, wrote, "We must surrender ourselves to the authority of Holy Scripture, for it can neither mislead or be misled ... The Bible is a volume of letters from the Heavenly country."
- * It is the direction in which this Confession points us. It is at the beginning of our Confession of Faith because it is the *basis* and *foundation* of our faith. Therefore, everything the Bible says, - and that which is based faithfully upon His Word, - is all for the majesty and honour of God's supreme glory alone.
- * And within this context we seek, - in the study of our Baptist Confession of Faith, - to be faithful to the words that Paul wrote to the Church at Colosse, *4:6 Let your speech (founded upon the Word of God) be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.*