

2 Timothy 3:16-17

It's crucial that we approach Scripture as the Word of God, and not just as a mixed bag of human ideas from which we pick and choose. If Scripture is God's Word, then it has the same **authority** as God does, when it's rightfully understood.

How do we know that this is God's Word?

One evidence is that the Spirit of God confirms it in our hearts. The Spirit is essential for our understanding of Scripture, regardless of how expert we are with the English language.

Why is it so important for us to engage, respond to, experience and reflect on God's Word? Before you go on, quickly jot down in the margin some reasons from 2 Timothy 3:16-17 to study God's Word. Please make your learning active.

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 (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

1. Scripture is inspired by God. The word translated "*inspired*" in some of the older Bible translations literally means, "*breathed out by God*." It's the product of His creative Spirit. The New Testament (NT) writers approach Scripture as the human form of God's own witness, possessing His **authority**. The Bible is, therefore, God's own testimony and teaching in human form, both fully human and fully divine in the original autographs. Certainly, we feel the uniqueness of the human writer alive and fully engaged and energetically visible within the texts of Paul, or Jeremiah, or Hosea. Still Jesus Himself says that every detail of God's Word can be counted on, even down to the smallest letter and the tiniest stroke of the pen, since this is God's Word with His authority.

"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" (Jesus in Matthew 5:18).

"[God] spoke a Book and lives in His spoken words, constantly speaking His words and causing the power of them to persist across the years"
(A.W. Tozer, "*The Pursuit of God*").

2. Scripture is authoritative, so we know...

- What's right – "*for teaching*"
- What's **not** right – "*for...rebuking*"
- How to get right – "*for...correcting*"
- How to stay right – "*for...training in righteousness*"

It helps to remind us the purpose for which the Bible is given. It's profitable, useful, beneficial, and effective in accomplishing its work. And it's work as an authentic guide is to point people towards a right relationship with God and with one another.

What more do we need?

God's Word is a searching light and a transforming power when enlightened and applied by the Spirit of God. God's Word works. It accomplishes the task for which it was given when we participate through obedience because of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

Because Scripture has a divine origin (it's "*inspired*"), it can be trusted. **Authority** resides in God's inspired Word interpreted by God's Spirit to our willing hearts because it's **God's** Word.

God normally directs the beliefs and practices of His people through revealed truth. To grow best, all our ideas, attitudes, and responses must be submitted to God's Word and tested and adjusted by it.

3. *Scripture is effective to develop...*

...**maturity**, who we are, character ("so that the man of God"). The man (or woman) of God becomes complete, mature in character, in fit condition, by hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, and responding to the Word of God. God's people in Scripture, like Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Elijah, David, Esther, Mary, Paul, and Timothy, and in church history, were all men and women who were devoted to knowing and doing God's Word.

...**ministry**, what we do ("may be thoroughly equipped for every good work"). God's Word does not just develop deepening character. It also outfits us to partner with Jesus in His ongoing adventure. Scripture, properly studied and understood, deepens in us responses of playfulness and compassion, care and kindness, as we learn to see others as fellow image-bearers, and serve their highest and best. God's people are called to partner with the Community-God by carrying forward His purposes. Scripture is one of the foundational ways we are equipped. Look at godly men and women through the ages. You will be hard pressed to find ones who were not deeply formed by God's Word. The study of the Bible is not intended to accumulate information, but to change lives and impact ministry so we partner with the Trinity to serve others as God's "thoroughly equipped" people.

"Scripture is *designed* for meditation. These are living words that we are meant to enter through meditation. They are revelatory, light-bathed, God-breathed words that can lead us into God's presence. What's the sense in believing in the inspiration of Scripture if you don't believe *that*?"¹

Meditation is not a sleepy, meaningless practice that we mindlessly practice.

"I think a new world will arise out of the religious mists when we approach our Bible with the idea that it is not only a book which was once spoken, but a book which is now speaking. [God is] speaking is in the continuous present"
(A.W. Tozer, "The Pursuit of God").

Perhaps you may say, "I'm a relational person so Bible study is tough for me."

Then I would suggest a fundamental change in how you view Scripture.

Jesus is also a relational person. And He loved God's Word **because** He met relationally with His Father there, in His own Words. The Word of God is also relational because we meet there with the Father, Son and Spirit. This encounter then prepares us to meet with others fruitfully. God gives revelation as an invitation into a divine encounter, into fuller dimensions of relationship with Him.

Learn to embrace God's Word as **our** authority. Then you will be in the ideal setting to form that indispensable habit of inwardly gazing on God until we are transformed into the likeness of Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18).

¹ Ken Wilson, *Mystically Wired*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), p. 70.

“Many of them found the secret...of inwardly gazing upon God. [When the habit] becomes fixed within us, we shall be ushered onto a new level of spiritual life more in keeping with the promises of God and the mood of the New Testament. The Triune God will be our dwelling place even while our feet walk the low road of simple duty here among men” (A.W. Tozer, *“The Pursuit of God”*).

Learn to partner with the Spirit to gather truth personally. Each follower of Jesus must grow to become inwardly motivated to light our own inner fires so we can pass it along to others. This does not mean we don't need others. Just the opposite. Yet we are gatekeepers of our hearts.