

THE WONDERFUL WORD #2 – 2 Tim. 3:16,17

As Don Price was breaking into the Varsity Club at 2:00 in the morning in the city of Indianapolis on November 2, 1946, a merchant policeman snuck up behind him, stuck a pistol in his back and pulled the trigger. The bullet whizzed within an eighth of an inch of Don's heart collapsing his lung and lodging in the top of his spine. The next day, the headlines in the Indianapolis paper read FATHER OF 30 DAY OLD TWINS SHOT ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE CITY.

After Don miraculously recovered from his gun-shot injury, he was sentenced to a term in prison. Don entered the penitentiary with anger and bitterness in his heart. And it wasn't long before he got into a fight and was sent to solitary confinement in the hole – a 6 foot square cell with a 14 inch wide board for a bed. While he was spending his disciplinary time in the hole, Don heard a man in the cell on the other side of the wall beside him reading the Bible. Angered, Don yelled at him to quit – he didn't want to hear that Bible reading. But the man kept reading anyway. With nothing else to do and certainly no place to go, Don Price had no alternative but to sit and listen to the Word of God being read all day long. By the 2nd or 3rd day, the Lord was beginning to work in Don's heart through his hearing of the Scriptures. Suddenly Don decided that he would offer God a deal to see if what he was hearing was really true. Don prayed: "God if you let me get out of the hole today, then I will go to the chapel service tomorrow." Amazingly, within a couple of hours, a guard came to release Don from his confinement in the hole and led him back to his other cell. True to his word, Don went to the chapel service the next day where he heard the gospel presented. Don Price gave his heart to the Lord Jesus Christ at the conclusion of that chapel service that day.

Don studied the Bible every spare minute that he had throughout the rest of his prison sentence. When he was released on parole, Don enrolled in the Grand Rapids School of Bible and Music. After he graduated from Bible school, Don joined the staff of the Mel Trotter Mission in March of 1953 where he served for over 30 years leading hundreds of people to Christ until he went home to be with the Lord in 1985. Don's complete turnaround in life all started in the prison hole where he was forced to listen to the Bible for a couple of days straight.

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews penned the truth that the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any two-edged sword, it penetrates even to the dividing of the soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Heb. 4:12). In his 2nd epistle to Timothy, Paul reminded this young preacher of this innate power in the Scriptures. In his comments, Paul spoke of 4 distinct ministries that God's word has in our lives. We began 2 weeks ago looking at these 4 ministries of the Scriptures in our lives. Last time, we looked at the teaching ministry that the Bible

has in our lives. God reveals His truth through His word. As we study the Bible, we can learn about God, about ourselves and about the world around us. We also looked at the rebuking ministry that the Bible has in our lives. Because we are all born with a sinful nature that is naturally at enmity against God, and because none of us knows the Bible perfectly, and because we all live in this world where we are bombarded day after day with a false philosophy authored by the enemy of God, we all have faulty views of the realities of life. Many times we assume something to be true when it in reality is false. The Bible helps us in that it points out these errors that are so destructive in our lives. The Bible rebukes our mistaken views of reality. The Bible is not only profitable for teaching or doctrine (that which is right and true), it is also useful for reproof (that which is not right, that which is false and in error).

Now let's look at the other 2 profitable ministries that God offers to us through his word. Notice them again with me as we read 2 Timothy 3:16,17:

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

Now a third profit of the Scriptures to us is somewhat connected with the 2nd one, but it does have a different emphasis. The Bible is also useful for correction. Whereas the Greek word for reproof comes from the root word meaning conviction indicating that the Bible changes our false assumptions so that we can have the right convictions, the Greek term for correction is a medical one meaning to restore to a right state. It is the word that would be used of a doctor setting a broken bone. When a person suffers a compound fracture to a bone, healing can only begin to take place when the bone is properly set to the right position. If the healing process begins before the bone is properly set, the bone sometimes has to be broken again and then set properly in order for there to be full function of the limb again. So the Bible is useful in correcting our lives. It not only tells us what is right in its teaching and what is not right in its reproof, but it also tells us how to get right in its correction.

It was a year ago now that Sandy and I were preparing for our 6 week trip to Israel. We continue to share fond memories of interesting places and people with each other. One person who often enters the conversation was a young man named Aaron. Aaron managed the book store of the Israeli Bible Society in the shadow of the wall of the Old City. Aaron was born into a secular Jewish family in the western suburbs of Chicago. As he grew into his teenage years, Aaron sensed something missing in his life. After trying a variety of means to fill that void in vain, Aaron decided that maybe his inner longing was spiritual in nature. So Aaron began to read the Scriptures. Now, remember, the Scriptures for a Jewish person is what we call the Old Testament. Aaron read the Hebrew Bible through. And then read it again, and again. Eventually, the Lord worked in Aaron's heart and he came to believe that Jesus was God's Messiah – simply from reading the O.T.

Scriptures. Aaron trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior and his life was dramatically transformed. Today, Aaron is obsessed with sharing God's Word with others. On the day when we first met Aaron, he had already given our 20 copies of the Scriptures to Jews and Arabs alike. Aaron lives in an Arab neighborhood at some personal danger to himself just so that he will have more opportunity to witness to Arabs. During his younger years, Aaron's life had been empty and unfulfilled. He had been like a raft drifting on open waters. But the Scriptures have now led Aaron to purpose and fulfillment in life. He is now like a ship headed to a sure destination. The Scriptures corrected the course of Aaron's life. The Scriptures not only introduced new meaning and purpose into his life, but they also redirected his life so that he now would be involved in eternal pursuits.

A final profit of the Word of God in our lives is for training in righteousness.

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The word that is translated "training" here is "paideia". It was the word that was used to describe the whole educational process of children. We often use that Greek term as a root word when speaking of children today. A pediatrician is a doctor who specializes in children. Well, just like we have a program today to educate our children, so back a couple of millennia ago, education of children was also very important. This word reflects that priority. Listen to what the Greek expert Kenneth Wuest has to say about this word: This word indicates the "whole training and education of children which relates to the cultivation of mind and morals, and employs for this purpose, commands and admonitions, reproof and punishment, whatever . . . cultivates the soul, especially by correcting mistakes and curbing passions, hence, instruction that aims at the increase in virtue."

When a person is born again into the family of God, that individual begins the Christian life just like every other believer – as a baby. Just like every member of the human race enters life on this earth the same way, as a baby, so every member of God's family is also born as a spiritual baby. Now this is not as readily apparent to us because unlike the process of physical birth, people are born again spiritually at all different physical ages in life. But every true Christian begins spiritual life as a spiritual baby.

We all realize that nourishment is indispensable to physical development in life. When a baby is born, that baby must receive proper physical nourishment in order to grow and develop in life. This is the reason tiny Lydia Joy Winne went through an operation just this past week to have the port put in her tummy so that she could receive regular nourishment so that she could grow and develop physically. So it is also indispensable to our spiritual growth to have proper nourishment. Our spiritual food comes mainly through

the Word of God. God has given to us in His word everything that we need for our spiritual growth and development. So we must have a steady diet of the Scriptures if we are to have proper training in righteousness. If we fail to study the Bible, we are going to suffer from spiritual malnutrition.

It is amazing how many times God's Word is compared to food in the Bible. There are a number of symbols used to illustrate the value and power of God's Word, of course. James compares it to a mirror. Jesus compared it to seed that is planted in the ground. Several times the Bible is compared to the cleansing power of water. The Psalmist compared the Scriptures to the illumination of light. Several times it is compared to the weapons of a sword or hammer. The Bible is also compared to the value of gold and fine apparel. But the symbol of food eaten is by far the most common symbol that is used of God's Word.

*When the Lord Jesus Christ was in the wilderness being tempted by the Devil, he answered that first temptation by comparing God's Word with bread.

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

*The Psalmist compared God's Word to honey.

PS 19:8 The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.

PS 19:9 The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.

The ordinances of the LORD are sure
and altogether righteous.

PS 19:10 They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the comb.

*In both Corinthians and Hebrews, the writers compare the Scriptures to milk and solid food.

*In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote: Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly--mere infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. (1 Cor. 3:1,2)

This analogy was also used in the letter to the Hebrews where it says: ¹² 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! ¹³ Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the

teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Heb. 5:12-14)

The reason for these comparisons is clear. We all know instinctively that we need food in order to sustain our lives. In fact, the first natural instincts that a baby has after coming out of the womb are to breathe, cry and eat. A baby doesn't need to be taught to eat. A baby just naturally knows to eat. Just as physical food is essential to our health, so God's word as spiritual food is essential to our growth in grace. *No wonder the Apostle Peter wrote: As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. (1 Peter 2:2)

So then, we see the value of God's word to our lives. God has given to us an inspired book so that we might have a reference the guide us through this life.

*if we have questions about what is right, we can study the Bible that is profitable for teaching

*if we have adopted ideas that are wrong, we can study the Bible that is profitable for reproof

*if we have drifted into practices in our lives that are sinful, we can study the Bible that is profitable for correction.

*if we are not growing and maturing in the Lord as we should, we can study the Bible that is profitable for instruction in righteousness.

*The Bible is useful for teaching us what is right, for reproofing what is not right, for correcting us so that we might do right and for training us so that we might stay right.

Paul concludes this portion of his instruction to Timothy by saying that it is God's purpose through His word that the man of God might be thoroughly equipped. It is critically important to be properly equipped. When a young person enlists in one of the branches of the armed forces to serve his country, before he or she is thrust into battle with the enemy, he first goes to an intensive time of basic training. Recruits do not look forward to basic training. Basic training is a time of rigorous physical exercise, it is a time of intense discipline, it is a time of accelerated learning. If recruits had a vote in the matter, we probably wouldn't have any basic training in our armed forces programs. But those who are experienced in the field of combat with the enemy know that basic training is indispensable for new recruits. For unless a soldier is prepared and equipped for combat, he will endanger himself and others on the battlefield. So the new recruits are forced into peak physical condition so that they might be able to endure the rigors of the battle. And they are thoroughly equipped so that they might have the protection that they need when engaging the enemy. Then they are trained in the proper use of that equipment so that they might be able to utilize their weapons to the fullest extent. It is only after they are thoroughly trained that they are sent into battle with the enemy.

We must never forget that we are engaged in a spiritual battle with God's enemies. The Apostle Paul concluded his epistle to the church at Ephesus with these words: READ Eph. 6:10-18

EPH 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

We must never forget that the only offensive weapon that is listed by Paul in our spiritual armor is the sword of the spirit which is the word of God. Every other piece of armor is defensive in nature. But God has given to us the sword of the spirit as our sole offensive weapon. That sword of the spirit is the Word of God. If we are not availing ourselves of this indispensable weapon, we cannot hope to be successful in our battle against the enemy.

Happily, God has made this weapon available to all of his children. What a privilege we all have living in this day. We all have the Word of God in the language that we speak. We all have the educational opportunities that allow us the privilege of reading that precious word. God's Word is among the most priceless treasures that we have here on this earth.

In the book entitled *Deep Joy for a Shallow World*, Chinese author Richard Wing tells an interesting anecdote from his native country. Glenn Adsett, who had been serving in China as a tent-making missionary, had been discovered by the communist Chinese authorities and sentenced to house arrest for his evangelistic activities until his fate would be determined by the Chinese court. Eventually, when his case came before the judge, it was determined that they would allow Adsett to leave the country with 200 pounds of possessions. The Adsett's were somewhat relieved even though they knew that they would greatly miss their ministry there in China. At least Glenn would not be sentenced to long years in jail. So the Adsett's began the process of weighing out the most precious articles that they possessed. Their computer was weighed; some of the favorite children's toys were weighed; some of the Chinese art and vases that they had purchased were weighed. Finally they came to the place where they had their possessions together at 200 pounds on the nose. But all of their plans changed immediately when the soldiers who came to escort them to the airport

asked them a single question: *Have you weighed your children?* All of a sudden, all of those possessions that they had carefully gathered and weighed didn't seem so precious after all when compared to their children.

We live in a day when we have unprecedented opportunities and luxuries and privileges. But when all of these are compared to the eternal Word of God, they pale in comparison. Don't let all of the good things of this life rob you from what is the best.

A person can't grow spiritually without feasting on the Word of God any more than he can grow physically without eating nourishing meals. The Scriptures are indispensable to our spiritual lives. For the word of God is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God might be thoroughly equipped for every good work.