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Defending Inspiration - Part 2 The Protestant Reformation to Today

I have a lot of books in my office that are important to me. These two books are really special to me. This was my grandfather's devotional book on my dad's side and this was one of the Bible's my grandmother on my mom's side used before she went to be with the Lord. I know this is not the case for all of you, but I have been blessed with a godly heritage. My family tree is weighed down with Christ followers. I'm grateful for a godly heritage. My mom is here tonight visiting and she has passed down to me and my brother a godly heritage that she received from her mom.

You may not have a godly heritage in your biological family, but you do in your spiritual family. You stand on the shoulders of a multitude of Christians who stand for what you believe in. Most of them stood for the inspiration of Scripture at a cost. We need to remember and give thanks to God for those who have come before us.

Tonight we finish our study on the doctrine of inspiration. What we are doing in our first few weeks is laying the foundation for the next three years of study as we work through 9 important doctrines in Scripture. **We have to establish the reliability of the Bible before we explore its major teachings.** We have to remind ourselves what the Bible is so we can commit to learn all that It says.

I spent the first two weeks considering the two key New Testament texts on the doctrine of inspiration. 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21.

Let's remember a key text for the doctrine of inspiration. Open your Bible to 2 Timothy 3:16. Paul is about to die for his faith and he is encouraging Timothy to

be faithful to ministry after he is gone. Why would Timothy keep preaching the Word and keep living the Word after his mentor is gone? Paul reminds Timothy just before his death, "¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

In many English translations, including the New American Standard and the King James Version the greek word *Theopnustos* is translated inspired by God or given by inspiration of God. **The greek word literally means God-breathed.** The basic meaning of the doctrine of inspiration is that the words of Scripture are the words of God. This is what our Savior affirmed when he was tempted by the devil. Matthew 4:4, "But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'" That last part is what we mean by inspiration - **Every word of Scripture proceeds out of the mouth of God.**

Look at 2 Peter 1:21 again with me. This verse explains the process of inspiration. Peter is about to die and he is reminding the church why the Scripture is reliable. 2 Peter 1:21, "²¹For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." The writers of Scripture were directed by the Spirit so that the choice of their words formed exactly the message that God wanted communicated.

Alva McClain, "**The object of what we call inspiration is not the man, but the book; not the writer, but his writings; not the speaker, but his words. The purpose of God in inspiration was not to give us a number of infallible men who would soon pass away, but to give us an infallible book that would never pass away. As the prophet said, 'All flesh is grass..the grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand forever' (Isaiah 40:6-8). Flesh may fail and pass away but the Word stands.**"

Inspiration is the result of God's act in controlling those who impart His revelation to others. Why is what they wrote reliable? **Because they wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.** They wrote under the influence and direction

of God the Holy Spirit. **That means Scripture is fully the Word of God, even though it is recorded in the words of human beings.**

This is what sets Scripture apart. Keith Mathison helps us understand why this sets the Scriptures apart from everything else, "**Inspiration is a unique characteristic that belongs to Scripture alone. The writings of the church fathers are not inspired. The creeds of the church are not inspired. There is a distinction between that which is inspired (Scripture) and that which is not (everything else).**"

Last week we talked about the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture - Plenary inspiration means that every part of the sixty-six canonical books of the Bible was the product of divine inspiration to an equal degree. The black letters are just as important as the red letters if you have a version of the Bible where the words of Christ are in red. All Scripture is equally important because it is all the product of divine inspiration.

Why is this important to consider? *What a person believes about the Bible determines what a person does with the Bible.* We see that in the lives of unbelievers who live under the prince of the power of the air. Ephesians 2:2 says that Satan works in the sons of disobedience. Who asked the first question in the Bible? The Bible is full of period's until Satan shows up.

Satan asks the first question in Scripture in Genesis 3.

Therefore, we shouldn't be caught off guard that people who don't know Christ, people who live under Satan's rule do the same thing today.

To be honest, that is how we were before the Spirit of God changed us through the gospel. We were all running from God and His Word instead of submitting to His Word prior to salvation. We were all under the prince of the power of the air until God delivered us into the kingdom of His Son. We were all children of wrath before we became sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ.

What I want to do tonight is to finish our study of church history as it relates to the doctrine of inspiration and then I want us to spend some time in the book of James reminding ourselves what God uses His Word to accomplish in our lives. Last week we considered the first 1500 years of church history and how the Lord preserved His truth through the early church fathers and the middle ages. **Most of those men didn't interpret the Bible the same way that we do, but they were willing to defend what the Bible is even to the point of death.** To defend Scripture in a broken world has always been costly. It will always be that way as long as Satan is the little g god of this age.

Tonight we want to finish our jet tour through church history as it relates to the doctrine of inspiration. We want to cover about 500 years of church history from the 1500's to today. We begin a little over 500 years ago in a town called Wittenburg, Germany.

On October 31, 1517 an Augustinian Monk named Martin Luther nailed 95 thesis or 95 concerns to the door of the castle church in Wittenburg, Germany. The reason Martin Luther did that is because the more he studied Scripture the more he became concerned with certain practices that were taking place in the Roman Catholic Church. What he read in Scripture and what he saw in the Roman Catholic Church didn't line up. Let me give you one example.

If you traveled back in time 500 years a massive building project would have been in the works. In 1517 the Roman Catholic Church was in the process of building an impressive building in Rome called St. Peter's Basilica. The building project began in the early 1500's. What's interesting is how the Roman Catholic Church raised funds to build St. Peter's Basilica.

The Pope at the time, Pope Leo X, came up with a unique fundraising strategy. **Pope Leo 10 granted a plenary indulgence program to help fund the building.** What's that? *An indulgence was something you could buy, basically pay the church, in order to get your dead relatives out of purgatory quicker.* We don't have time in this lesson to go into the erroneous doctrine of Purgatory.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls it, 'a final cleansing of human imperfections before one is able to enter the joy of heaven.' Indulgences were offered as a way for people to get people they loved out of Purgatory quicker.

One Catholic priest turned salesman was named Johan Tetzel. He came up with a catchy slogan he would take throughout the countryside. He would tell people, "**As soon as a coin in the coffer rings** the soul from purgatory springs." People heard that promise and they paid up. The sale of indulgences was the way the Roman Catholic Church raised funds to build St. Peter's Basilica.

If that sounds slimy to you, you're not alone. Martin Luther had a big problem with the sale of indulgences for 2 reasons - He believed this was beneath the Pope and beneath the Roman Catholic Church. This really mounted up to fleecing the flock. But the bigger issue was this - **Who has the authority to absolve sin?** Does the Pope really have the power to absolve sin? That's what really concerned Martin Luther.

Luther was an Augustian Monk who spend much of his time as a Professor. He spent time studying and teaching the Psalms and Galatians and Romans and what he began to find is that what he was learning from the Bible and what he was seeing in the Roman Catholic Church didn't add up. $2+2=7$. That's why he nailed his 95 thesis or 95 concerns to the Castle Church Door in Wittenburg, Germany on October 31, 1517. He never meant to start a split. He simply wanted to dialogue about these concerns. To debate these issues. But Luther got a lot more than he bargained for.

Instead of just killing Luther for challenging the Pope, the Roman Catholic Church sought to disprove Luther's claims. They called on one of their top theologians, the Joe Montana of the Roman Catholic Church - a man named Johan Eck. **They brought in Johan Eck out of the bullpen to strike out Luther.** Johan Eck was a scholar of medieval theology, Canon Law, and an expert in the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church. Luther and Eck were actually friends. They knew each other. Now they would be pitted against one another in a series of debates in Leipzig, Germany.

Here is what became apparent to all who watched and listened to the debates - Eck continually quoted from the Scripture **and other sources** - Scripture *plus* medieval theology, Scripture *plus* Canon Law, Scripture *plus* the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church. Luther, on the other hand, stuck to Scripture as his final authority. When you stick with Scripture alone you end up with different theological conclusions than people who add to the word of God.

A few years later, in 1521, when asked to recant some of the things He wrote, Luther famously stated: **“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by evident reason-for I can believe neither pope nor councils alone, as it is clear that they have erred repeatedly and contradicted themselves-I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is my basis; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one’s conscience is neither safe nor sound. [Here I stand; I can do no other.]* God help me. Amen.”**

Luther continually defended the nature of the Scripture. In the first five volumes of Luther’s collected works (they total 55 volumes) there are over one thousand explicit references to the verbal inspiration of Scripture!

Luther himself states: **“We must make a great difference between God’s Word and the word of man. A man’s word is a little sound, that flies in the air, and soon vanishes; but the Word of God is greater than heaven and earth, yea greater than death and hell, for it forms part of the power of God and endures everlastingly; we should therefore, diligently study God’s Word and assuredly believe that God Himself speaks to us.”**

In another place he states: “It is cursed unbelief and odious flesh which will not permit us to see and know that God speaks to us in Scripture and that it is God’s Word, but tells us that it is merely the word of Isaiah, Paul or some other man who has not created heaven and earth.”

Luther is emphatic that this inspiration extends to the form as well as the content of the Scripture. In other words he affirms the inspiration of the words of Scripture. He states: "But why by the phrase 'by every word'? Because disbelieving one single word, you no longer live by the Word of God. For the single whole Christ is in every word, and he is wholly in all single words. When, therefore, one denies in one word Him who is in every/all words, one denies Him in His totality."

For that and many other reasons the battle cry of the reformation, the foundational principle if you will, became Sola Scriptura. **That Scripture alone is the final arbiter of divine truth**. That in order to know God's will about anything you stay within the boundaries of the Bible. We measure everything taught in the church against the standard of Scripture. That's where absolute truth is found. As Jesus prayed for us the night before the cross in John 17:17, "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy Word is truth."

My favorite quote from Luther on the impact of Scripture on his own life is this - **"The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me."**

John Calvin was born on July 10, 1509 in Doyon France and died on May 27, 1564 in Geneva, Switzerland. He defied the inspiration of Scripture when he wrote, "When it pleased God to raise up a more visible form of the church, He willed to have his word set down and sealed in writing. . . the whole body [corpus], therefore, made up of law, prophesies, psalms and histories was the Lord's Word for the ancient people."

In His Institutes of the Christian Religion he wrote, "Let this be a firm principle: No other word is to be held as the Word of God, and given place as such in the church, than what is contained in the Law and the prophets, then in the writings of the apostles. . . [They] were sure and genuine penmen of the holy Spirit, and their writings are therefore to be considered oracles of God: and the sole office of others is to teach what is provided and sealed in the Holy Scripture.[Institutes, IV, viii]"

Concerning 2 Tim 3:16 he commented:

He [Paul] commends Scripture, first on account of its authority, second on account of the utility that springs from it. In order to uphold the authority of Scripture, he declares it to be divinely inspired: for if it be so, it is beyond all controversy that men should receive it with reverence. . . . Moses and the prophets did not utter at random what we have from their hand, but since they spoke by divine impulse, they confidently and fearlessly testified, as was actually the case, that it was the mouth of the Lord that spoke. . . . **We owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God, because it has proceeded from Him alone, and has nothing of man mixed with it.**

"The full authority which they [the scriptures] obtain with the faithful proceeds from no other consideration than that they are persuaded that they proceeded from heaven, as if God had been heard giving utterance to them."

Calvin was a vigilant defender of Scripture against its detractors. I love this quote by Calvin on Scripture, **"A dog barks when his master is attacked. I would be a coward if I saw that God's truth is attacked and yet would remain silent."** Calvin spent his life courageously teaching and defending sound doctrine.

After the reformation we move into the period of the Puritans. **The united goal of the Puritans was to reform the reformation.** Michael Reeves describes it this way, "It was not that they thought they were pure; it was that they wanted to purify what in the church and in themselves had not yet been purified. They wanted to reform everything the Reformation had not touched. They thought the reformation was a good thing, but that it was not yet complete."

There are a lot of misunderstandings of the Puritans. We don't have time to get into it tonight because I want to end our time taking you through some Scripture on living by the book. What really united the Puritans was their passionate love of Scripture. They passionately pursued studying Scripture and listening to

Scripture taught. They were willing to travel hours to hear a good, long sermon and they believed a good Bible study was the best way to spend an evening.

Sermons up to seven hours long were not unheard of. One man named Laurence Chaderton once preached a 2 hour sermon and he followed his sermon with an apology. He apologized for going long. How did they respond? They said, "Sir, go on, go on." Remember there had been a famine in the land for a very long time. After darkness light was shining and they wanted the light of truth. Remember Europe had been without Scripture for about a thousand years. Electricity had come back on and they wanted to use it up.

Michael Reeves, **"To be able to read God's Words, and to see in them such good news that God saves sinners, not on the basis of how well they repent but entirely by His own grace was like a burst of Mediterranean sunshine into the grey world of religious guilt."**

John Bunyan, who lived from 1628-1688, wrote Pilgrim's Progress. If you've never read Pilgrim's Progress I would highly recommend it. He encouraged God's people, "Read the Bible, and read it again...Neither trouble yourself, though you may not have commentaries and expositions; pray and read, and read and pray; for a little from God is better than a great deal from man."

Jonathan Edwards lived from 1703-1758. He is highly regarded as the finest theologian America has ever produced. He preached a sermon in 1753 called The Scripture is the Word of God. He exhorted the church to: "Consider how much it is worth the while to go often to your Bible to hear the great God Himself speak to you. There you may hear Christ speak. How much better must we think this is than the word of men. Better than the word of the wisest man of the world. How much wiser is God than man. Here all is true; nothing false. Here all is wise; nothing foolish."

Most of you know Charles Spurgeon. He lived from 1834-1892. He wrote this description of Scripture, "I do not believe that, from one cover to the other, there is any mistake in it of any sort whatever, either upon natural or physical science,

or upon history or anything whatever. I am prepared to believe whatever it says, and to take it believing it to be the Word of God; for if it is not all true, it is not worth one solitary penny to me. It may be to the man who is so wise that he can pick out the true from the false; but I am such a fool that I could not do that. If I do not have a guide there that is infallible, I would as soon guide myself, for I shall have to do so after all; I shall have to be correcting the blunders of my guide perpetually, but I am not qualified to do that, and so I am worse off than if I had not any guide at all. Sit thou down, Reason, and let Faith rise up.”

Spurgeon went through many many difficulties serving Christ. What held his life together was God's Spirit using God's Word. He testified to the impact of Scripture on his own soul this way, **"Nobody ever outgrows Scripture; the book widens and deepens with our years."**

Martyn Lloyd Jones was born in 1899 and died in 1981. He was a highly skilled medical doctor, one of the finest in England, when he left his practice as a doctor to pursue being a pastor. "The Scriptures are a divine product breathed out by God. Inspired really means "God-breathed." We mean that God breathed these messages into men and through them, and these Scriptures are the result of that divine action. We believe that they were produced by the creative breath of the almighty God. Put in a simpler form, we mean that everything we have here has been given by God to man."

We skipped over Benjamin B. Warfield who wrote some excellent works on the inspiration and authority of Scripture. Also a man named Rene Pasche who wrote The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture, which is helpful.

James Montgomery Boice is someone you should all be familiar with. He lived from 1938 until 2000. He pastored at Tenth Presbyterian Church for a little over 30 years. He wrote, "It is beyond doubt that Jesus highly esteemed the Old Testament and constantly submitted to it as to an authoritative revelation. He taught that the Scriptures bore a witness to him, just as he bore a witness to them. Because they are the words of God, Jesus assumed their complete reliability, in whole and to the smallest part."

He also taught, **"We are to believe and follow Christ in all things, including His words about Scripture. And this means that Scripture is to be for us what it was to Him: the unique, authoritative, and inerrant Word of God, and not merely a human testimony to Christ, however carefully guided and preserved by God. If the Bible is less than this to us, we are not fully Christ's disciples."**

John MacArthur, who is a few years away from his 50th year of full time ministry at Grace Community Church in Los Angeles comments on 2 Peter 1:21, **"The Holy Spirit thus is the divine author and originator, the producer of the Scriptures. In the OT alone, the human writers refer to their writings as the words of God over 3800 times (e.g., Jer. 1:4; cf. 3:2; Rom. 3:2; 1 Cor. 2:10). Though the human writers of Scripture were active rather than passive in the process of writing Scripture, God the Holy Spirit superintended them so that, using their own individual personalities, thought processes, and vocabulary, they composed and recorded without error the exact words God wanted written. The original copies of Scripture are therefore inspired, i.e., God-breathed (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16) and inerrant, i.e., without error (John 10:34, 35; 17:17; Titus 1:2). Peter defined the process of inspiration which created an inerrant original text (cf. Prov. 30:5; 1 Cor. 14:36; 1 Thess. 2:13)."**

If you go on the internet and look at our Grace Bible Church website under what we teach The very first paragraph establishes our view of inspiration, **"We teach that the Bible is God's written revelation to man, and thus the 66 books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (equally inspired in all parts) Word of God (1 Corinthians 2:7-14; 2 Peter 1:20-21)."**

Ok. Do you see how what we understand about Scripture is nothing new? We have a long history of godly people who have come before us. Having established the fact of what the Bible teaches about the inspiration of Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21 and tracing some of the good guys in church history and what they stood for, here is the million dollar question - How do we benefit from the Bible?

Please turn in your Bible to James 1 and I want to finish by showing you what to do with this book. James 1:16-25 shows us how God uses His Word in the life of the believer for our good and for His glory. These verses show us how God uses His Word to give us both life in Christ and growth in Christ.

1. God uses His Word to give us life in Christ - James 1:16-18

James 1:16-25

- 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.
- 17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.
- 18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

James is writing to Christians who are going through trials. Coming to Christ didn't lead them to an easy life. Most of them probably heard the gospel and came to faith in Christ in Jerusalem but because of persecution they have had to leave their homes and spread out to Gentile lands. Life in Christ was not comfy cozy for these people.

James writes to provide God's people with the wisdom we need to endure trials in a way that brings glory to God. This letter reminds us that trials are not to be wasted. They are God's tool for transforming us into the image of Christ. I love the quote by Spurgeon on what he learned through difficulties for Christ - "I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages." Trials are good for us but we need help to endure them the right way.

In verse 16 we have a command - This is a command that connects back to verses 13-15. Don't be deceived about what? **Don't be deceived about where sin comes from.** These Christians going through tough times were starting to blame God for their sin. James forbids that. God is not the author of sin.

Christians are not to make the mistake of blaming God rather than themselves for their sin.

Then in verses 17-18 James provides an encouraging reminder of what God is the author of. **He is not the source of sin. He is the source of salvation.** God is the giver of every good and perfect gift and God does not change. What's a prime example of a good and perfect gift from God? REGENERATION. God's greatest gift to us in giving us life in Christ. **In verse 18 James reminds Christians going through trials that God uses His truth to cause us to be born again.** In verse 18 James describes a doctrine we will come back to in our 8 week study of soteriology, the doctrine of salvation.

James 1:18 is a description of regeneration. It's a reminder that God is the cause of the new birth and His Word is the instrument of the new birth. God regenerates sinners through the power of His Word. Tasker reminds us that **'Men are made His sons when they hear and respond to the gospel of salvation, here called the Word of truth as in Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:15.'**

Why do we love the Bible? Without Scripture we would still be dead in our sins. We would be without hope and without God in the world. Now, everything is different. Because of Scripture we do have hope because we know God personally by trusting in His Son.

The purpose of regeneration is that we would become God's firstfruits. **The church is the cream of God's crop.** Christians of all ages are the choicest and finest of God's creation because we are part of His new creation in Christ. **James did not want believers in the midst of tough times to forget that God is not the source of our sin, but God is the source of our salvation.** We have new life in Christ because God used Scripture to give us that new life. God is for us and not against us. He is not the source of sin but He is the source of our salvation.

But James doesn't stop with a reminder of the power of God's Word for regeneration. We can't stop here. There is something more. In verses 19-25

James reminds us something equally important about what God uses His Word to accomplish in our lives.

2. God uses His Word to give us Growth in Christ - James 1:19-25

James 1:19-25

- 19 *This* you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger;
- 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.
- 21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.
- 22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.
- 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;
- 24 for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.
- 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

In the beginning of verse 19 James issues another command as it relates to Scripture. Know this is a command. He reminds the church that he issues this command to people he loves - beloved brethren. What else do we need to know about Scripture? We will finish with the pathway to experiencing the power of Scripture for transformation:

a. Be a good listener - James 1:19-20

How must we approach Scripture to benefit from Scripture? When you are going through a trial you have to keep going to God's Word the right way. How do we approach the Bible the right way to benefit from Scripture in the midst of a trial?

Let me ask it this way - How many ears do you have and how many tongues do you have? You all have two ears and one tongue. Why do I use that word

picture? **God gave us two ears and one mouth to remind us to listen more than we speak. We learn while listening, not while speaking.** We must learn to spend time in silence in order to listen to Scripture. We need to keep our mouths closed so our minds will be ready to hear. Proverbs 17:27 reinforces this wise counsel: 'He who has knowledge spares his words.'

Be quick to hear the Bible. Be slow to speak against the Bible. Be slow to get angry. The greek word here for anger has to do with an infuriated disposition. Someone in a trial who keeps up his talking is a poor listener and a poor listener is subject to failure in keeping their anger in check.

Christopher Morgan, "But specifically, James seems here to speak of anger as it relates directly to the life-giving Word. He warns us not to be angry at God's Word because it reveals our sin and challenges our behavior and values. Like a man who stones the prophet for delivering God's message, this man becomes angry at the Word because it reveals God's truth to him."

The first way to approach Scripture is to listen and learn.

b. Be a good repenter - James 1:21

The second way to benefit from Scripture is to leave sin behind. James 1:21, "Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls." To benefit from Scripture you must keep repenting of sin. The idea here is to rid yourself of sin in order to receive the Scripture the right way. Believers can't have it both ways. You can't run after sin and run after Scripture at the same time.

What if you had an important surgery? What would you expect to find in the operating room? You would want the surgical area to be clean and sterile. You wouldn't want someone operating on you with tools that had been used earlier in the day on another surgery. You want clean instruments. In the same way, you have to get rid of the filth of sin to benefit from the clean and pure word of God.

Humility is key to benefitting from the Bible. Notice the middle of verse 21. After you confess and turn from sin in humility receive the word implanted. It is the opposite of being 'quick to speak and quick to be angry' (v. 19). We do well to ask ourselves: 'Do I come to Scripture with a gentle, open, and teachable spirit? Do I welcome God's truths into my heart? Do I entertain it in my mind and will?'

Simply agreeing with the truth is not the same as obeying it. That's where James ends in verses 22-25.

To benefit from the Bible you must understand it is the tool God used to give you life in Christ. You must learn to come to His Word as a good listener, as a good repentor and finally a good doer of the word:

c. Be a Good Doer - James 1:22-25

James 1:22-25

- 22** But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.
- 23** For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;
- 24** for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.
- 25** But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

To benefit from the Bible we have to get to this final step. Obeying the Word consistently is key to benefitting from the Bible. In authentic Christianity we as believers ought to strive daily for increased obedience to the Word that has been implanted into our hearts. There is a spiritual danger in just hearing without acting on what we know to be true. We can even deceive ourselves at the point of our own salvation. Doers of the Word have the right attitude toward God's Word that leads to action.

The illustration here is clear. James provides the illustration of someone who looks into the mirror and then walks away and forgets what they look like. That won't work. God isn't impressed with our daily Bible reading if we immediately walk away and forget what we read. Meditation that leads to application is the pathway to blessing.

The good listener takes time and the trouble to 'look intently' or 'gaze' into God's Word and consider the implications for his life. He takes his time and peers into the Word to grasp its meaning and make application to his personal life.

A.T. Robertson writes, "The man remains by the side of the roll of the law spread out before him and unrolls page after page with the keenest interest and zest until he rightly grasps the meaning of God. Thus he puts the Word into practice. He has it stamped on his mind and heart. He is a Christian pragmatist. He ... practices the presence of God. He translates the word of truth into his own life and becomes a living epistle."

So, how do we benefit from the Bible? By remembering God is not the source of our sin. He is the source of our salvation by the Word and our sanctification by the Word. Therefore, God's inspired Word is all we need to know God and to please God. We all need to remember that, especially when we face trials and hardships for following Christ. Let's pray.