

Growing Through The Word

Thrive! Growing and Changing in the Christian Life

Michael A Tiberi Jr

Living Hope Bible Church

January 10, 2016

I. The Nature of Scripture

a. Special Revelation More Valuable Than General Revelation

- i. "Let us then consider it certain and firmly established that the soul can do without anything except the Word of God and that where the Word of God is missing there is no help at all for the soul. If it has the Word of God it is rich and lacks nothing since it is the Word of life, truth, light, peace, righteousness, salvation, joy, liberty, wisdom, power, grace, glory, and of every incalculable blessing." (Luther)
- ii. Our God is a speaking God. Idols can be seen, but they cannot speak. God cannot be seen, but He speaks.
 1. "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host." (Ps 33:6)
- iii. God has spoken audibly in history to real people. The god of the deist does not speak – he has no concern for the affairs of men and does not speak to them. The God of the Bible speaks and He speaks to man.
- iv. If God did not speak then we would not know Him.
- v. Since God is transcended, special revelation is necessary for saving knowledge of God: we cannot know God, in the truest sense of the word, without Him revealing Himself to us. Natural revelation, God's divine attributes that are clearly seen by all in His creation, is not sufficient to save any human being, but it is enough to condemn them.
 1. "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven" (Ps 11:4)
 2. "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool" (Isa 66:1)
- vi. The Scriptures are the means by which we can know God – they are where God has revealed Himself by the Holy Spirit
- vii. Scripture is God's written self-disclosure.
- viii. "The prevailing characteristic that set the God of Israel apart from the gods of the Gentile nations is that he speaks. The idols can be seen, but they neither speak nor act. By contrast, the God of Israel—Yahweh—cannot be seen, but he speaks and acts!"¹
- ix. God and His word are always present together.²

¹ John Clark, *Class Notes: Systematic Theology 1 – Revelation* (Chicago: MBI, 2013), 5.

² Frame, 521.

- b. Inspiration
 - i. Definition: God's Word was breathed out/spoken by God Himself through human authors who were carried along by the Holy Spirit
 - ii. "For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (1 Peter 1:21)
 - iii. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Tim 3:16-17)
 - iv. Inspiration means "that God [the Holy Spirit] takes words of human beings and makes them his own."³
 - v. "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe." (1 Thess 2:13)
 - vi. The technical terms orthodox theologians use to describe this inspiration is *plenary verbal inspiration*.
 - 1. *Plenary* means that everything in the canon Scripture is God's Word
 - 2. *Verbal* means that the words of Scripture, not simply the ideas, are inspired by God.
 - 3. This means that we believe that every word in Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit
 - vii. The Spirit inspired the Bible and illuminates it to God's people.
- c. The Authority of Scripture
 - i. Flowing directly out of our discussion of *inspiration* we can now talk about the *authority* of Scripture.
 - ii. Because the Bible is God's inspired Word it is authoritative. Remember that we have said that every word in Scripture has been inspired of the Holy Spirit, therefore every word of Scripture is authoritative.
 - iii. ¹⁶ The Lord is king forever and ever (Ps 10:16)
 - iv. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers" (Ps 24:1-2)
 - v. Scripture is not authoritative because we have decided it is by our autonomous (self-governing) reason. Nor is it authoritative because a group of scholars say it is. Scripture is authoritative because it is God's Word. He who has made the heavens and the earth, who is the Supreme Being in all the universe, the author of truth and righteousness, has spoken it.
 - vi. You may now be asking: How can I really know that the Bible is God's Word? Are there any evidences that can prove it to me?

³ Frame, 596.

1. Calvin: “The testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men’s hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded.”⁴
 - vii. The Christian does not stand over the Word or in front of the Word; the Christian is bowed in submission under the Word.
 - viii. “When God commands, we are to obey. When He asserts, we are to believe Him. When he promises, we are to embrace and trust those promises”⁵
 - ix. Because God is God, and because He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things He owns all things and has authority over all things. Nothing and no one are exempt from His authoritative rule. What He commands is to be obeyed, what He promises is to be believed. This means that we do not approach Scripture from a critical standpoint, putting it under our microscopes to determine whether or not it is indeed true or needs to be obeyed. We do not get to evaluate God and His authoritative Word with our own self-made criteria.
 - x. How can I prove to someone that God’s Word is true and authoritative? By pure facts and reason you cannot convince them. As Calvin so aptly pointed out, it is only by the inner testimony of the Spirit that someone can come to believe that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God.
- d. The Sufficiency of Scripture
 - i. “Scripture contains all the divine words needed for any aspect of human life” (Frame)⁶
 - ii. ¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16)
 - iii. WCF, 1.6: “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is

⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion & 2* (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; vol. 1; The Library of Christian Classics; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 79.

⁵ Frame, 530.

⁶ John Frame, *Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 618.

either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word; and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.”⁷

- iv. The Bible contains all that we need to know to glorify God, which is the chief end/purpose of man.⁸
- v. The Bible also contains all that we need for salvation, faith and life.
- vi. The Bible is sufficient for all of faith and life in all areas, both what it explicitly teaches and what can logically be deduced from it. Certainly human logical deduction is fallible and we will err, but when our logical deductions adhere to Scripture, that is, our logical deductions do not add or remove anything from Scripture, they are authoritative. What I mean is this, suppose you are a dentist. There is nothing, as far as I can tell, that gives specific instructions on how you ought to preform dental work in the Scriptures. Yet it would not be correct for me to say that Scripture is not sufficient for dentistry. Though Scripture does not contain instructions on how to fill a cavity or remove a tooth, it does contain all the divine words necessary for a dentist to be a good dentist. The Bible instructs us to do all that we do to the glory of God. This includes, by logical deduction, dentistry. Scripture instructs us that we are to be honest in our business dealings, and by logical deduction we can say authoritatively that the dentist must conduct his business with integrity. So when we say that Scripture is sufficient we are not saying that it gives us all the precise and specific details for all that we do, but that it gives us the principle truths for life and faith. How these truths apply to our specific lives and situations requires logical deduction, and when we use our logical deduction properly we apply the truths of Scripture to our everyday lives without adding or subtracting from it.

II. The Purpose of Scripture

- a. Now I know what you think I am going to say now: “you need to read your Bible.” That is certainly true! But that’s not what I want to emphasize this morning. The fact is you can read your Bible day in and day out and not

⁷ Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Edinburgh Edition* (Philadelphia: William S. Young, 1851), 18–19.

⁸ Frame, 619.

draw any closer to God. How can you say that Mike? Doesn't God's Word say that it will not return void to Him? True! His Word always accomplished its purposes because God's Word is always true. But the issue at hand is not will God's Word accomplish its purpose, it will. The reality is that if you treat God's Word as an item on a list of the Christian life that needs to be checked off to make God happy with you and to receive a blessing from Him than you are not using the Word of God as it was meant to be used. You are like the foolish Galatians who have been saved by grace and now are trying to attain godliness and favor with God through your works.

- b. The Scriptures teach us how we can be saved. This is the gospel, which is the good news of how we can be reconciled to God and thus have true knowledge of Him
- c. The Scriptures also teach us how those who know God ought to live
- d. Knowledge is a relational category in Scripture. To know God is to be in a right relationship with Him.⁹
- e. God is a relational being; He is the eternal three in one. God made us in relationship, "let us make man in Our image," and for relationship.
- f. "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3)
 - i. Carson: "Eternal life turns on nothing more and nothing less than knowledge of the true God. Eternal life is not so much everlasting life as personal knowledge of the Everlasting One."¹⁰
- g. ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ... (Eph 4:13)
- h. "What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God. What is the 'eternal life' that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God. "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent (Jn 17:3). What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight and contentment than anything else? Knowledge of God. "This is what the LORD says: 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me (Jer 9:23-24). What, of all the states God ever sees man in, gives God most pleasure? Knowledge of Himself. "I desire... the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings,' says God (Hos 6:6)."¹¹
- i. "The width of our knowledge about [God] is no gauge of the depth of our knowledge of Him."¹²

⁹ Willem VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 413.

¹⁰ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 556.

¹¹ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 33.

¹² *Ibid.*, 39.

III. Growing Through Scripture

a. Mine

- i. The quantity of your time that is spent engaged with God's Word is directly correlated to the quality of your relationship with Him.
- ii. "If your growth in godliness were measured by the quality of your Bible intake, what would be the result?"¹³
- iii. "Reading gives breadth, but studying gives us depth."¹⁴
- iv. You need to both read large chunks of Scripture and study deeply select portions.
 1. Read the entire Bible annually. Find a good reading plan to follow. I would recommend the M'Cheyne reading plan. It is helpful because it has you reading both Old and New Testament texts and it has you in multiple genres. On top of that you will have read the New Testament and Psalms twice and the OT once in a year.
 2. Read a book of the bible in one sitting.
 3. Study in depth a book of the Bible or a theme found in Scripture.
- v. Tools needed for good study of the Bible
 1. A good translation (NASB, ESV, NKJV)
 2. A concordance or Bible Study Program
 3. A Bible Dictionary
 4. A good study Bible or one volume commentary

b. Meditate

- i. The word meditation has sadly been hijacked by New Age and Eastern religions that have totally redefined the term in wholly unbiblical ways. Meditation is not, as they would claim, the emptying of ones mind, the seeking of inner peace through thinking on nothing. No, biblical meditation (which is a biblical word!) is the thinking upon, musing over, chewing on the Word of God.
- ii. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Ps 1:1-2)
 1. The word meditation quite literally means, "muttering." At its base meaning it means to mull over something in a low inaudible voice. This is not to say that all true meditation must include muttering under your breath, but it does show us that Christian meditation is not mindlessness, but thinking over and repeating of something.

¹³ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for The Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1993), 33.

¹⁴ Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1996), 40.

2. What is that something? Well we see right here in Psalm 1 that it is the Law or instruction of YHWH. The Christian is one who is characterized by this type of meditation.
3. "Meditation may be characterized as deep, reflective thought, often occurring in a repetitive or enduring fashion."¹⁵
 - i. "The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers. ²And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. ³And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (Deut 8:1-3)
 - ii. "It is better to hear one Sermon only and mediate on that, than to hear two Sermons and meditate on neither" (Thomas White)¹⁶
 - iii. Thomas Watson: "Study is the finding out of a truth, meditation is the spiritual [profitable use] of a truth; the one searcheth for the [presence] of gold, the other digs out the gold. Study is like a winter sun that hath little warmth and influence [by itself]: meditation... melts the heart when it is frozen, and makes it drop into tears."¹⁷
 - iv. Thomas Watson: "A Christian without meditation is like a soldier without arms, or a workman without tools. Without meditation, the truths of God will not stay with us; the heart is hard, and the memory slippery, and without mediation all is lost."¹⁸
 - v. Thomas Manton: "Meditation is a middle sort of duty between the word and prayer, and hath respect to both. The word feedeth mediation, and meditation feedeth prayer..."
 - vi. Guidelines:
 - a. Meditation ought to be once a day, better twice a day morning and evening if possible.
 - b. Set an appointment with God! Take it serious.
 - c. Morning or evening is your preference, though morning is preferred to set the tone for the day.

¹⁵ Willem VanGemen, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 1007.

¹⁶ Joel R. Beeke & Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids: RHB, 2012), 893.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 894.

- d. Set apart the Lord's Day for extended and more focused meditation.
 - e. Pray for the Holy Spirits work in your heart. Ask Him to focus the eyes of your heart upon Christ.
 - f. Read the Scriptures upon which you will meditate. I recommend a reading plan for this. Indeed it would be good if you could find a reading plan that will help you get through the entire Bible in a year. Read relatively large chunks of Scripture.
 - g. As you read listen to the illuminating voice of the Holy Spirit as He applies the Word to your heart. Certain verses will stand out, for, ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.
 - h. Mark with a pen or highlighter the passages that strike you the most. Keep a journal to record these verses and your thoughts on them.
 - i. Spend some time memorizing the verse(s) that stood out to you.
 - j. Take time to mull over these verses. Think upon them. Think of what they tell you about God. Who He is, what He is like. Think of what they tell you of His promises. Think of what they tell you about His saving works. Is there something that God wants you to believe/trust Him for? Think of what they tell you about yourself. Is there a reproof/correction to be heard? Does it reveal sin in your heart? Do you need to repent of something? Is it a sin of commission or omission? Is God calling you to do something?
 - k. Meditate until you meditate.
 - l. "Meditate until you sense a benefit to your soul..." It may often feel like starting a fire with wet wood, but he who perseveres will produce a flame. "When we begin to meditate, we may first garner only a bit of smoke, then perhaps a few sparks, 'but at last there is a flame of holy affections that goes up towards God... Persevere till the flame ascends."¹⁹
 - m. Conclude with prayer.
- vii. Obstacles
- a. Wandering mind. This makes no exemption from duty. You need to exercise your mind in the service of Christ. It may seem like a drudgery for a time and you may find it difficult, but resolve today that by the help of the Holy Spirit you will dedicate yourself to careful meditation on

¹⁹ Ibid., 896.

God's Word. As one of the Puritan's said: "You will find meditation becoming easier and sweeter in due course."²⁰

- b. Busyness. I haven't met too many people around here who aren't busy. Are you busy? Me too. I had a professor ask me once how my time in God's Word had been. I had to answer him honestly and let him know that I had been very lax in my quiet times because I had been too busy. What he asked me next was quite honestly life changing. He asked me if I had eaten lunch that day. I answered in the affirmative and he responded by saying, "so you take the time to feed your belly but not your soul? Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord."
- c. Worldly pleasure or entertainment. Bates: "The pleasures of the world muddle our souls, and unfit our bodies for the duties of meditation... Remember this, the sweetness of religion is incomparably more than the pleasures of sense."²¹
- d. Laziness. Be disciplined, for as Paul said, "train yourself for godliness; ⁸ for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. (1 Tim 4:7-8). No one accidentally become godly. You don't just fall into godliness. You must train by the power of the Spirit.

c. Memorize

- i. I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." (Psalm 119:11)
- ii. Donald Whitney: "The Word of the Word is the "sword of the Spirit," but if there is no Bible physically accessible to you, then the weapon of the Word must be present in the armory of your mind in order for the Spirit to wield it. Imagine yourself in the midst of a decision and needing guidance, or struggling with a difficult temptation and needing victory. The Holy Spirit enters your mental arsenal and looks around for available weapons, but all He finds is a John 3:16, and Genesis 1:1, and a Great Commission. Those are great swords, but they're not made for every battle."²²
- iii. If I offered you a thousand dollars for every verse of Scripture you memorized would you be motivated? How about for every book of the Bible? Do you not believe that knowing God is of much greater value than any monetary prize.
 - 1. Consider these words: "7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure,

²⁰ Ibid., 905.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Whitney, 40.

making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. (Ps 19:7-10)

- iv. Piper: “[I have emphasized much] on Bible memory because I believe in the power of the indwelling Word of God to solve a thousand problems before they happen, and to heal a thousand wounds after they happen, and to kill a thousand sins in the moment of temptation, and to sweeten a thousand days with the ‘drippings of the honeycomb.’”²³

d. Wielding Scripture

- i. Resisting the Devil
- ii. Overcoming the Flesh
- iii. Transforming the Mind
- iv. Proclaiming the Gospel
- v. Encouraging the Saints
- vi. Making our joy complete

²³ John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 123.