

2 TIMOTHY 3:14-17

CERTAINTY IN A QUESTION MARK WORLD

“As for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 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. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”¹

Someone has noted, accurately in my estimate, that conservative Christians are sprinters. Professing Christians who espouse a liberal Christianity appear to be running marathons. Christians who are committed to ardent pursuit of the Faith burst out of the blocks, but tire quickly. It would be easy to conclude that consistency is in short supply among the faithful. However, I suggest the greater problem for us who are committed to Christ is that we tire easily. We need encouragement to keep on keeping on.

As followers of the Christ, one thing grips us firmly, enabling us to run the race with confidence—we are assured of the veracity of the One who redeemed us. Because He is always true, we are confident of the salvation He provides and which we now possess. We are certain that the Word which He has given is truth—and we have read the end of the Book. We are equipped to live without fear in the midst of a broken, fallen world. We know that in Christ we have not only an ultimate victory—we now have victory.

While victory is ours now, it is distressingly easy for the child of God to be distracted by this dying world. Like Peter walking on the sea, our eyes cannot help but see the raging maelstrom, the turmoil and the restless nature of mankind. Though we are redeemed, we are susceptible to the world’s constant appeal for our attention.

For instance, it is almost impossible not to compare our worth by how much of this world’s goods we have amassed. We are inundated with the message that only those with great wealth or those who are known by name throughout the world are of worth. Thus, we often feel as if we are failures because we aren’t part of some noble profession. We berate ourselves because we are just housewives, or because we work with our tools, or because we don’t have a great portfolio of stocks and bonds representing the great companies of our nation.

Again, it is almost impossible not to be bombarded with the rawest forms of sexual titillation. One need not look for pornography—it invades our homes through television, through music, through literature and at every turn on the Internet. We are susceptible to the siren allure of forbidden fruit. Consequently, both men and women are engaged in a strange dance of moving toward just peeking at the faux beauty of airbrushed models engaged in the most private activities and seeking forgiveness because we know it contaminates our souls, destroys our marriages and dishonours God.

From time-to-time it is necessary for us to be reminded that we have a sure foundation for the Faith we possess. We need one another to encourage us to fix our gaze on the Master who has led the way into the glory. We have been given three great gifts to equip us for eternity—the Spirit of God, the Word of God and the people of God.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

I haven't time to explore these gifts in the depth they deserve. By God's mercies, I pray we can provide some understanding and practical help for each Christian longing to gain victory over the world, the flesh and the devil. We know the bonds which once held us in thralldom, the condition of our lives described by the Apostle as he wrote the Ephesian saints. "You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" [EPHESIANS 2:1-3]. What I can say with confidence is that each Christian is now engaged in a great conflict; and though the outcome for the Christian is certain, individual battles will continue to be won or lost on the basis of what we do with the gifts God has provided each one.

A SOLID FOUNDATION — "As for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 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." Paul begins by drawing a contrast for Timothy. As we have seen in previous messages, Paul has been exposing the nefarious work of false teachers.² The passage begins in the identical manner that Paul used to begin the tenth verse—"Sú de"; "you however," and the "you" is in an emphatic position.

When the Apostle urges Timothy to continue, he uses the present imperative of the verb, indicating that this action must be continual. In other words, Timothy must make it his habit to continue in the life he has been taught and which he has seen modelled. When we considered the preceding verses, I sought to stress that doctrine and life were not to be treated as an either/or proposition—they must be seen as a both/and requirement for a healthy life.³

This presents a potential problem in our day when many professing Christians are untaught. Preachers often appear to be ignorant of the Word. They are trained in psychology and sociology and they are trained in contemporary counselling techniques. Thus, they substitute bringing a message born of the agony of study and prayer by speaking of whatever happens to be popular on the Internet at that particular moment. Alternatively, they appear to be trained to avoid speaking at all so the worship team can present an hour of praise music or in order to allow the children to entertain the congregation with an amateur hour. Contemporary Christians must ask how the Apostle would have viewed contemporary attempts at worship! What is required for victory in the Christian life is a solid foundation consisting of sound teaching and solid teachers.

A solid foundation requires **SOUND TEACHING**. In the text Paul urges Timothy, "Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed" [2 TIMOTHY 3:14]. Paul has warned the young elder against what is being presented to the faithful by false teachers. Paul has just warned against "evil people and impostors [who] will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" [2 TIMOTHY 3:13]. Those of whom he warned would be marked as errant because their folly would be plain to all [see 2 TIMOTHY 3:9]. He had compared these individuals to the Egyptian magicians who had opposed Moses. He also named two of the false teachers then plaguing the saints in Ephesus, warning Timothy to "avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and [the teaching] will spread like gangrene" [2 TIMOTHY 2:16, 17].

² Michael Stark, "I Did Not Quit," (sermon), May 22, 2016, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/2-Timothy-3.10-13-I-Did-Not-Quit.pdf>

³ Ibid.

One of the great tragedies concerning errant teaching is that Christians know the errant teaching isn't right, but they are still capable of stifling the uneasiness they feel allowing themselves to tolerate just a little bit of error. The Spirit of God gives them no rest, but they don't want to disturb the church or they don't want to jeopardise friendships they have cultivated for a long time, so they tolerate what makes them ill at ease. What is especially tragic about this situation is that Christians who fail to heed the Spirit, stifling His warnings and ignoring the red flags He is throwing are unaware that they are moving inexorably toward spiritual disaster.

Let me iterate the apostolic warning—each of us is susceptible to falling into deception. If we fail to obey Scripture, failing to maintain vigilance, we will fall into all sorts of error. Being a Christian is so much more than a one-time decision or an occasional church service or even acting in kindness toward needy people. Christianity—true Christianity—involves continuing dependence on Christ and continuing obedience to Him as Master over life. The Faith is proved by endurance. Such obedience was what earned the Apostle's commendation of the saints in Thessalonica. "We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come"
[1 THESSALONIANS 1:2-10].

Refresh your memory as to the danger arising from tolerating just a little bit of error. Listen to an earlier warnings found in this same letter as read from a contemporary translation. "Stay clear of pious talk that is only talk. Words are not mere words, you know. If they're not backed by a godly life, they accumulate as poison in the soul. Hymenaeus and Philetus are examples, throwing believers off stride and missing the truth by a mile"⁴ [2 TIMOTHY 2:16-18]. Mere talk that fails to transform is deadly. If we gauge the impact of the Faith by how the faithful live, can we say that the Faith is transformative?

Sound teaching implies not only that those delivering the Word of God are faithful to Him who appoints to holy service, but that each one receiving the Word accepts it as it truly is. The truths of the Faith are not as dishes arrayed at a buffet. We are not permitted to pick a bit of this or a little of that because we find these teachings agreeable, though we will avoid yet another truth because it is too demanding. We are not given the right to pick and choose as we like; we are responsible to receive the whole teaching of the Word. If the message we have received is the very Word of God, then we are not given permission to choose what we accept and disregard other aspects of the Word.

The Apostle declared, "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" [ACTS 20:27]; and that declaration must be the aim of each teacher of the Word. However, just as the elder must declare the whole teaching of God, so each Christian must receive that truth when it is delivered, allowing the Word to have its perfect work.

⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2005)

Let me take a moment longer to point out a significant truth concerning those who teach. Throughout this **FOURTEENTH VERSE**, Paul used the aorist tense, indicating prior action. In other words, Timothy is equipped to receive what is being conveyed at this point because he previously learned these truths and he had already incorporated them into his life. The importance of this point is that the pulpit is not a place for neophytes. To be certain, there is training taking place so long as a man is in the ministry; however, his theology must be well established before he assumes the position of an elder and his character is to be well developed before he is ever accepted to direct the affairs of the congregation.

This is the impact of the qualifications set forth for all elders. “If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil” [1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7].

Sound teaching must be combined with **SOLID TEACHERS**. Paul not only urges upon Timothy the need to embrace sound teaching, but also to ensure that he follows solid teachers. Commenting on this verse, Calvin wrote, “There is nothing more alien to faith than a credulity that accepts everything unquestioningly, no matter what source it comes from.”⁵ Ultimately, our faith rests in God Himself. However, if those who teach us handle the Word deceitfully, they are liable to lead us astray. At the least we may be tempted to model our lives after them when they are walking contrary to the Word and will of God.

I remind you that those whom the Apostle sought to expose in Ephesus were as those whom he exposed in Corinth. You will recall that Paul defended stripping away the masques these counterfeits had adopted when he wrote, “What I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness” [2 CORINTHIANS 11:12-15a].

The Apostles of our Lord did not resort to deceit. However, it is possible for the elect to be taken captive through such deceit, else why would the Apostle warn, “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” [COLOSSIANS 2:8]? Error will definitely grow more common in the last days, as the saints are increasingly seduced by error. The Apostle has warned, “The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared” [1 TIMOTHY 4:1, 2].

I would like to think that Paul was referring to himself when he says that Timothy is to remember from whom he learned these truths; however, “whom” is plural. I suppose it could refer to the elders in Lystra and in Derbe or even to Paul and Silas. However, I believe Paul is referring to Lois and Eunice, Timothy’s grandmother and mother. Why should this be of importance? Because it takes the teaching out of the theoretical and makes it practical.

⁵ John Calvin, **1, 2 Timothy and Titus, Crossway Classic Commentaries** (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL 1998) 154

When I prepare a message, I endeavour to ensure that I have invested time in the presence of the Living God. I labour in order to deliver a message and not a delightful little talk. I want those who listen to my words hear the voice of the Spirit of Christ speaking through the Word of God as they consult the passages to which I direct their gaze. As the Word takes root in their lives, they will be transformed into the image of God's own Son.

Because those who hear me are being transformed, they will have an impact in the lives of others who know them. Thus, a mother who receives the teaching of the Word will in turn instruct her children in those same truths into which she was schooled. A father will incorporate the Word into his life and amplify what God has spoken into his heart so that his family hears and is transformed. If the transformation brought about by the preached Word stops with you, it will be futile and of no eternal value. This is the reason the Master gave us the Great Commission: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" [MATTHEW 28:19, 20].

In plain English, you who hear are to be those from whom others are taught the truths of the Word. We endeavour to deliver the Word through radio, through television, through the Internet and from the pulpit. Certainly, there are many who hear. However, our goal as a congregation and my goal as a pastor is equipping saints to amplify the message, magnifying the Lord God as each one rebroadcasts the message they have received so that yet others hear.

Fathers, in particular, must accept the responsibility both to know truth and to live the truth they know so that their family is brought to the Saviour at the earliest possible day. If fathers fail in this responsibility, and many tragically fail in this day, they handicap their family. Surely, the stern warning of the Master must apply in such a situation. Jesus warned, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" [MATTHEW 18:6]. I do not pretend to know all that is entailed in this warning, but I know the One who warns us. No man should presume against the grace of God by failing to instruct his family.

We live in a wicked day in which many are blinded by the baubles of this dying world, trinkets that are destined for dust. Consequently, they are not teaching their family, they are not accepting responsibility to lead their family to Christ. Increasingly, our children are raised by mothers who must do the impossible task of presenting their children to the Saviour. If a father fails in his responsibility, then my prayer is that those godly mothers will seek the Lord's strength, drawing deeply from His grace and His power to raise their children to know the Lord. I do not say that their task is easy, but each mother in that situation can learn to say with the Apostle, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" [PHILIPPIANS 4:13].

Let each Christian accept responsibility for one another. As the Family of God, as a Community of Faith, as the Church of the Living God, let each believer accept responsibility for one another. In one of the earliest letters written by the Apostle, the Christians of Galatia were enjoined, "If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" [GALATIANS 6:1, 2]. This teaching is iterated when Paul writes the saints in Rome. In that Roman Letter, he writes, "We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, to build him up" [ROMANS 15:1, 2]. I am not excusing the absent father or the negligent mother; I am urging each member of the assembly to accept responsibility for one another. God's gift to each Christian is the people of God, the church.

A SURE SOURCE — “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” You will recall that I insisted that God has given us three gifts to enable us to live victoriously in the midst of a broken world. He has given us the people of God, the Assembly of the Righteous. Do not make light of the Church of the Living God; she is not perfect, but she is His holy bride. Another great gift given for our benefit is the Word of God.

We do not have fanciful tales of someone dictating what was to be written as he peered at what he called a “peep stone” that he had secreted in a hat. Neither are we encumbered with an absurd tale about an ignorant man writing with a golden pen on a palm leaf. What we do have is a collection of sixty-six books written by about forty men over a period of approximately two millennia. Each book reflects the particular style of the man who penned the words; and yet, together these books comprise one singular book that is a revelation of the mind of God. Scripture declares, “Know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God”⁶ [2 PETER 1:20, 21]. The Spirit of God superintended what was written so that it has been delivered without error. God transcended time and culture to ensure that we have a perfect revelation of His mind.

Whenever we read the Bible, we are not reading what some individual thought was appropriate to say; we are reading precisely what God’s Spirit meant to communicate for our benefit and for His glory. Because this is true the Apostle testifies to in the **SIXTEENTH VERSE**, “Every part of Scripture is God-breathed.”⁷

Throughout the Word of God, we see that those who delivered the Word were conscious that they were not merely giving their specious speculation of what an imaginary god might say. They claimed to deliver the very words of the True and Living God. As David wrote the Psalms, he would say on occasion,

“The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me;
His Word is on my tongue.
The God of Israel has spoken;
the Rock of Israel has said to me.”

[2 SAMUEL 23:2, 3]

It is amazing to read the words of the Prophets of Israel, noting how frequently they begin their various messages with the formula, “Thus says the LORD” or some variant. According to my best estimate, that phraseology occurs almost eight hundred fifty times in these ancient writings. The Prophets spoke, knowing that God was prompting them to deliver His Word. When they wrote, they were conscious that God was directing what was to be written. When we read what they wrote, we are reading the very words that God chose to deliver.

The knowledge that the collection of writings is sacred prompted the Masoretic scribes who copied the Word to treat what was written with exceptional care. They spoke each letter aloud before they penned it, counting every letter in each line as they copied. If the count did not agree with the document they were copying the entire copy was destroyed. Even though it was on vellum or even copper, the scroll was destroyed so that the Word would remain uncorrupted.

⁶ **New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update** (The Lockman Foundation, LaHabra, CA 1995)

⁷ **The Message**, op. cit.

We must take seriously the warning delivered as John draws the Apocalypse to a close. “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book” [REVELATION 22:18, 19].

Paul presents four aspects of Scripture that are profitable. In fact, one could argue that without Scripture these aspects would be severely handicapped at best and perhaps circumvented all together at worst. In the first place, Scripture is profitable for teaching. Paul has already testified that “the sacred writings ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” [2 TIMOTHY 3:15]. “The Sacred Writings” refer to the writings of the Old Covenant. However, now he is presenting the case that when God speaks as He did in the New Testament as well as in the Old Testament, this Word was profitable for teaching. Not only do these writings instruct mankind concerning the means of salvation, but they instruct those who are redeemed how to live in order to please God who has redeemed them.

When Satan tempted the Master, he sought to induce the Lord to use his divine prerogative to turn stones into bread. Jesus had been fasting for forty days and forty nights, and the Word simply notes, “He was hungry.” When Satan tempted Jesus, the response was a recitation of what is written in the Word. Jesus quoted the words of Moses recorded in DEUTERONOMY 8:3, “It is written,

‘Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

[MATTHEW 4:4]

When we present doctrine, it is not some concoction created out of the fertile imagination of sinful people; it is a presentation of the truths revealed in the written Word of God. We do not go seeking new revelations as the Scriptures constitute a perfect treasure of the mind of God. This book is a full revelation of all that is necessary for mankind to know what God would have us know for our good and for His glory. Whereas the false teachers presented teachings they claimed to be inspired, Paul warned that they were “doctrines of demons”⁸ [1 TIMOTHY 4:1]. In contradistinction to this, the Scriptures present “the doctrine of God our Saviour” [TITUS 2:10]. Paul also identifies the teaching of the Scriptures as “sound doctrine” [1 TIMOTHY 1:10; TITUS 2:1] or “good doctrine” [1 TIMOTHY 4:6]. The Scriptures present doctrine that conforms to godliness⁹ [see 1 TIMOTHY 6:3]. This doctrine drawn from the Scriptures is pure¹⁰ [see TITUS 2:7].

The Scriptures must be the source and controlling influence for all that a minister teaches. If a particular ministry will qualify as Scriptural, it will require careful attention, perseverance and meticulous study so that “our doctrine will not be spoken against”¹¹ [1 TIMOTHY 6:1]. That the ministry we present requires careful attention is evident from these words, “Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” [1 TIMOTHY 4:13]. That the service we present requires perseverance and meticulous study is evident from the admonition which informs us, “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” [1 TIMOTHY 4:16].

⁸ NASB, op. cit.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Scripture is also profitable for reproof. The word that is translated “reproof” is a hapax legomenon, occurring only here in the New Testament. The concept speaks of censure with the implication that there is adequate proof of the wrongdoing.¹² It is, if you will, the opposing side of teaching. Scripture exposes sin (reproof) and illuminates truth (teaching).

Yet another benefit of Scripture is “correction.” The word translated “correction” is, like “reproof,” a hapax legomenon; it occurs only here in the New Testament. The word describes restoring an item or an individual to an upright state. Thus, the concept conveyed by this word is restoration.¹³ Thus, “reproof” exposes and denounces sin; “teaching” supplies the required truth; and “correction” restores and rebuilds.

The final benefit supplied by Scripture is “training in righteousness.” The noun is used to speak of a father’s discipline [see **EPHESIANS 6:4**], whether the discipline is delivered by an earthly father [see **HEBREWS 12:5**] or by the Heavenly Father [see **HEBREWS 12:7, 8, 11**]. We see the verbal form of this word used each time we partake of the Lord’s Table. When Paul cautions, “When we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world” [**1 CORINTHIANS 11:32**], he is describing the discipline of God. Paul also used the word to speak of discipline of wayward Christians [**1 TIMOTHY 1:20**], and he admonished Timothy to employ this concept against the false teachers [**2 TIMOTHY 2:25**].

Let me stress that this word “correction” is more positive than we might imagine. We often think of “correction” as negative, but consider this teaching. “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” [**TITUS 2:11-14**]. The training to which Paul refers is this very word, “correction.” God’s grace is correcting us, and the method of correction is by the Word. The correction God delivers is always a mark of His love. We read in Scripture that “The Lord disciplines the one he loves” [**HEBREWS 12:6**]. To the Laodicean church, the Son of God affirms, “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline” [**REVELATION 3:19**].

The Word of God nourishes the child of God and refreshes them as they drink deeply from it. Peter will attest, “You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God” [**1 PETER 1:23**]. Just as the Assembly of the Righteous is a gift to bless us, so the Word of God is a divine gift to bless us. God seeks to ensure that we have what is necessary to stand against the forces of evil and to avoid falling from our secure position. There is yet one other great gift that God has given each Christian. I am speaking of the Spirit of God who lives in each Christian.

A SPIRITUAL PURPOSE — “... that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” God has set each believer within a community of faith in order to permit each Christian to exercise the spiritual gifts which God entrusts to each one and to provide for mutual accountability for our conduct in the world. God has also given us the written Word so that we may know precisely what He desires for us. There is no excuse for any Christian to question what God’s will might be, for He has given us a full revelation of His will in the Word of God.

¹² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains** (United Bible Societies, New York 1996) 435

¹³ Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1964–) 450–451

The Bible is a spiritual book, for working through this written Word is the Spirit who gave it. Has anyone ever been converted by reading the Quran? Do people read the Bhagavad Gita and choose to become Hindu? Would anyone reading the Eddas and Sagas of the Norse become pagans through reading these ancient works? Yet, literature is replete with accounts of people who became Christians through reading the Book. Permit me to share just a few instances of accounts of the impact of the Book on the lives of ordinary people.

William Barclay cites an account of “a ward sister in a children’s hospital in England. She had been finding life, as she herself said, futile and meaningless. She had waded through book after book and laboured with philosophy after philosophy in an attempt to find satisfaction. She had never tried the Bible, for a friend had convinced her by subtle arguments that it could not be true. One day a visitor came to the ward and left a supply of gospels. The sister was persuaded to read a copy of St. John. ‘It shone and glowed with truth.’ she said, ‘and my whole being responded to it. The words that finally decided me were those in John 18:37: “For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.” So I listened to that voice, and heard the truth, and found my Saviour.’”¹⁴

“In Brazil Signor Antonio of Minas bought a New Testament which he took home to burn. He went home and found the fire was out. Deliberately he lit it. He flung the New Testament on it. It would not burn. He opened out the pages to make it burn more easily. It opened at the Sermon on the Mount. He glanced at it as he consigned it to the flames. His mind was caught; he took it back. ‘He read on, forgetful of time, through the hours of the night, and just as the dawn was breaking, he stood up and declared, “I believe.”’

“Vicente Quiroga of Chile found a few pages of a book washed up on the seashore by a tidal wave following an earthquake. He read them and never rested until he obtained the rest of the Bible. Not only did he become a Christian; he devoted the rest of his life to the distribution of the Scriptures in the forgotten villages of northern Chile.

“One dark night in a forest in Sicily a brigand held up a colporteur at the point of a revolver. He was ordered to light a bonfire and burn his books. He lit the fire, and then he asked if he might read a little from each book before he dropped it in the flames. He read the twenty-third psalm from one; the story of the Good Samaritan from another; from another the Sermon on the Mount; from another 1 Corinthians 13. At the end of each reading, the brigand said: ‘That’s a good book; we won’t burn that one; give it to me.’ In the end not a book was burned; the brigand left the colporteur and went off into the darkness with the books. Years later that same brigand turned up again. This time he was a Christian minister, and it was to the reading of the books that he attributed his change.”¹⁵

It seems a tragedy that the distribution of Gospel tracts and Scripture portions is almost a lost art. Perhaps it is because we are overly timid, or perhaps it is because we no longer believe that God works through the reading of His Word. I cite **ROMANS 10:9-13** at the conclusion of almost every message. The verses that follow that portion of the Word are an encouragement in this regard, for those verses include this glorious promise. “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” [**ROMANS 10: 17**]. The Spirit of God, working through the Word of God transforms the heart of lost men and women. He is at work in our midst; and as each of us deliver the message of life, some will hear and believe.

¹⁴ William Barclay, ed., **The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, The Daily Study Bible Series** (Westminster John Knox Press, Philadelphia 1975) 199–200

¹⁵ Op. cit., 200–201

Because the Spirit of God superintends how the Word is applied to each heart, this book and this Faith turns lost people to life in the Beloved Son. It is always the goal of the Christian to grow in Christ. We seek maturity in the Spirit. That is the admonition of the Apostle when he writes, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

“If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit” [**GALATIANS 5:16-25**].

My plea for each believer is to appropriate these three great gifts. Invest yourself in the life of the Body. Don't treat the holy Bride of Christ as a common trollop to be used as you wish and then ignored. There is an awful cost to treating Christ's bride in such a dishonourable manner. Again, read the Word and apply what you read so that you will grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Finally, walk in the Spirit. Strive for maturity, growing up in Christ Jesus.

It is a simple message, but it is a meaningless message if you have never been born from above. If you have never received the gift of life that is given only through receiving Christ as Master over life, you will never be able to grow up in Him. The Word of God tells us that He died because of our sin, but that He was raised from the dead to declare us right with the Father. God calls each one in these words, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Master,’ believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be set free. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with the Father, and it is through openly agreeing with Jesus that one is set free.” That promise concludes by citing the words of the Prophet Joel, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be set free.”¹⁶

Our sincere prayer is that each one who hears this message will put faith in the Risen Son of God. May He be honoured by bringing many sons to glory. Amen.

¹⁶ See **ROMANS 10:9-13**