

GOSPEL HIGHWAY

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1. THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

by B. S. Poh

Controversies abound in the churches. Some controversies are not worth engaging in, for they have to do with matters that are not important. Titus 3:9 says, "Avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless." There are many occasions, however, when the faithful Christian must engage in controversies in order to defend the truth. He has "to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Failure to contend for the faith is failure to be faithful to the Lord and to His word. Furthermore, retreat from controversial issues will not help our own faith, since we will then remain unsure of the issues that are the subject of controversy.

All controversies must be settled by the word of God. Scripture is our "ruler" or "standard of measure". To know the dimensions of, say, a table, we must have an agreed standard of measure. It will not do if I have a ruler which is not of the same length as yours when both of them are supposed to be one metre long. If we do not have an agreed source of authority, there will be no possibility of coming to an agreement about anything. Communications will breakdown. There will be no common ground for discussion. We must agree that Holy Scripture should be our only source of authority.

There are those who argue that we must be guided by the Holy Spirit rather than by Scripture. That sounds so pious and correct but in reality it is nothing other than pious talk. The Holy Spirit causes a person to be born again by the hearing of God's word. It says in Romans 10:17, "Faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." We are told in 1 Peter 1:23 that a person is "born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever". The Holy Spirit does not work without means. He uses the word of God to bring about the new birth.

That is not all. The Holy Spirit also uses the word of God to sanctify, guide and build up a believer. A believer must "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). We are told, in Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." We are told in Ephesians 5:26 that Jesus Christ is sanctifying the church "with the washing of water by the word".

To be guided by the Holy Scripture is to be guided by the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit who moved men to write the Scripture. We are told, in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture *is* by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." Since all of Scripture is inspired by God, or "God-breathed", it possesses an authority that is unique. It reveals God, and His will, to us. If we wish to know the true God, and His will for men, we must turn to His word. Psalm 138:2 says, "You have magnified Your word above all Your name."

We must agree, then, that the Scripture should be the only authority in all matters of faith and practice. But what do we mean by this?

Scripture Is The Sole Authority

Complete

Firstly, this means that the revealed will of God as contained in the Bible is complete. There is no more revelation to be added to what is already there in the Scripture.

We must note that the "all Scripture" of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 is a reference to more than the Old Testament scriptures. It includes also the New Testament.

The Old Testament scriptures are called "the Holy Scriptures", or "the sacred writings", in verse 15. There, Paul says to Timothy, "...from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Timothy must continue in the things learned, not only from the Old Testament scriptures, but also from Paul himself (verses 10-14; 1:13; 2:2). Paul and all the other apostles were aware of the fact that they were conveying God's word to the church. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Christians, he said, "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe (1 Thessalonians 2:13)." In 2 Peter 3:15-16, Peter says this of Paul's writings: "...our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they* do also the rest of the Scriptures".

The apostles expected the revelation of God to be completed, so that the church will be established upon "the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20). When John wrote the book of Revelation in AD 96, on the island of Patmos, he must have known that, as the last surviving apostle, he was writing the final installment of God's word. The well-known verses found at the end the book of Revelation, although intended to end that book, must be seen as covering the whole Bible as well: "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18-19).

The warning is given in this passage that God will severely judge those who tamper with His word, either by taking away any part of it, or by adding to it. The same command was given in the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy 4:2 and 12:32, although not in the same fullness. God's word is given to be obeyed, not to be tampered with. The prophets of God wrote the Old Testament books, and the apostles and prophets of Christ wrote the New Testament books. The Old Testament scriptures pointed to the coming of Christ, and the New Testament books completed the teachings of the Christ who had come. The gospel is now completely revealed. This is "the mystery" referred to in the Bible (Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:24-29; Romans 16:25-26). This is the gospel age, "the last days", in which the elect are being called out of the world by the preaching of the gospel (Acts 2:17, 21; Matthew 28:20).

The Scripture is complete.

Sufficient

Secondly, when we say that Scripture is the sole authority, we mean that it is sufficient for all our needs. We are told in our text that Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness....". Only four categories of "profits" or benefits are mentioned, but these cover all areas of our lives. We cannot find any area of life which is not covered by one or more of these categories - whether it is our job, marriage, the raising children, or whatever. These four categories - doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness - are all-encompassing. Take for example the issue of watching the television. Are we to watch the television? What sort of programmes may we watch? The television is not harmful in itself. The programmes we watch must be governed by such truths as are found in Philippians 4:8: "Whatever things *are* true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever

things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things."

Take another example. Is it right for a Christian to gamble? We answer, "No!", although there is no explicit statement in Scripture that a believer may not gamble. We are certain that a Christian may not gamble because it leads to covetousness, discontent with what one has, trust in "chance" instead of in God, and addiction to gambling. All these are contrary to the teachings of the Bible (Colossians 3:5; 1 Timothy 6:8; Matthew 6:33; 1 Corinthians 6:20; John 8:36). It also causes the person to seek riches by the easy way out instead of earning a living by hard and honest work (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

We see then, from these examples, that Scripture is sufficient for all our needs. It is sufficient for the man of God to "be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work". Note what the text says: ***complete, thoroughly equipped, for every good work.***

Final

Thirdly, when we say the Scripture is the sole authority we mean that it is ***final***. This means that the teaching of the Bible must be accepted as correct; it must not be questioned; instead, we must submit ourselves to it. We are not saying that we accept whatever people teach us as the correct teaching of the Bible. We must "take heed how we hear" (Luke 8:18). We must weigh up what we hear. We must search the Scripture ourselves, like what the Bereans did, to find out whether the teaching is really correct (Acts 17:1-12). However, once the true teaching of Scripture is established, we must bow to it

An illustration will help. In Malaysia, there are three levels in the legal system. A person can be tried in the magistrate's court. If he is dissatisfied with the verdict of the court, he may appeal to the high court for a hearing. If he is still dissatisfied, he may appeal to the supreme court. Once the verdict is pronounced, the person may not question it - whether he likes it or not. He has to accept that as ***final***. What Scripture teaches is ***final***. It may not be challenged, questioned, or contradicted. We have to accept it as the will of God. We have to submit to it. While a human court can be wrong and unfair, God cannot be wrong or unfair. We must accept the verdict of Scripture. The more willingly we submit ourselves to it, the happier we will be!

This, then, is what it means when we accept the Bible as the sole authority in all matters of faith and practice. We regard it as ***complete, sufficient, and final***. Submission to God involves submission to His word. Love for God involves love for His word. That is why, whenever there is any controversy, or any uncertainty, we turn to the word of God. We will say, "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). The Bible decides!

The Perspicuity of Scripture

We often hear the objection being raised that different people have different interpretations of the Bible. By raising such an objection, it is implied that no one can claim he is right in his understanding of the Bible. It also implies that no one can be sure which is the right interpretation. If no one is sure which is the right interpretation, there is no need for anyone to follow the Bible! People are left to choose what they wish to believe. If that is the case, the authority of Scripture has been undermined. The individual is now the authority. ***He*** decides what ***he*** wants to follow!

This cannot be right. God has revealed His will to us in the Bible. If the Bible is really the ***revelation*** of God to us, it must be capable of being understood. Otherwise, how can it be the revelation of God? If it does not reveal God's will to us, it is not the revelation of God. For it to reveal God's will, it must be capable of being clearly understood. This is what has been called "the perspicuity of Scripture". What it means is basically that the Scripture is capable of being clearly understood. "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). If Scripture cannot be clearly understood, how is it going to be profitable to anyone? How can it reprove, correct and instruct? Scripture is capable of being clearly understood!

Capable of being clearly understood

Our lack of clarity in understanding any portion of Scripture must not be confused with the inherent perspicuity of Scripture. Scripture is capable of being clearly understood, but we may lack understanding of it because of personal limitations. Just because we are not clear about any doctrine does not mean that the Bible does not have clear teaching on that doctrine.

Take, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity. In the first three centuries after the apostles. Christians were troubled by wrong doctrines with regard to the Godhead. In order to refute those wrong doctrines, the early Christians had to clearly formulate what were right doctrines. They had, therefore, to wrestle with the teaching of the Bible. The Christian leaders had to meet often to discuss the matter. With time, the creeds were drawn up which expressed their findings. Today, we are able to state the doctrine of the Trinity without much difficulty, and we believe it to be a fundamental doctrine of the Bible.

The same thing is happening on some matters that Christians are disagreed about. As we study the Scripture, and interact with one another, the Holy Spirit wrestles with our spirits to lead us to a clearer understanding of the word of God. Some things might not be too clear to us now, but with time they will become clear. What is important is that we must believe that Scripture is capable of being clearly understood. And we must exert effort to study the word. It is as we prayerfully study the word of God that His Spirit leads us to an understanding of His truth.

Having said these, we must remember that the main things taught in the Bible may be clearly understood by anyone reading it with unprejudiced eyes. Martin Luther had to struggle with the doctrine of salvation, which for a long while was covered up by human traditions and Roman Catholic superstitions. We do not have to struggle the same way he did. We have only to listen to what he, and many other Christians like him, have discovered from the Bible. We examine their teaching in the light of the Bible, and find that salvation comes, indeed, by grace through faith in Christ alone, and not by the good works we perform. The same can be said about many other doctrines pertaining to God, the Christian life, and the church - they are clearly revealed in Scripture and may easily be understood.

The question that comes to us now is, "How may I understand Scripture correctly?" There are some basic rules of interpreting the Bible which we must follow.

Take the text plainly

Firstly, we must take the plain meaning of the words. Common sense and common practice tell us that this should be the way we read any text. For example, if the headline in the newspapers says "Tiger Kills Boy" we take it plainly to mean that an animal, namely a tiger, had killed a boy. We do not take it to mean that the Roman Catholic Church is attacking the Anglican Church! That would have been ridiculous. Communications between people will be impossible if we do not take words plainly. We will constantly be misinterpreting people, and we ourselves will constantly be misunderstood by others. Imagine what chaos, troubles and fighting will result!

The examples of Scripture also teach us this rule of "taking the text plainly". When the prophet Daniel read the writings of Jeremiah, he understood the words plainly and believed that the exile of the Jews was coming to an end after seventy years (Daniel 9:2 cf. Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10). This was also the way the Lord understood Scripture. In Matthew 11:10, He applied the prophecy of Malachi to John the Baptist, which said, "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You." While the prophecy itself did not state who the messenger was going to be, the meaning of the words were clear. The Lord understood the words plainly, and then applied that prophecy to John the Baptist. Another example is Matthew 13:14-17. There, the Lord understood the prophecy of Isaiah plainly. Verse 14 says, "Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive." In verse 16, He says, "But blessed *are* your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear." The Lord did not give wild and fanciful interpretations to those words.

These are just random examples of how the words of Scripture were taken plainly.

It needs to be noted that "plainly" does not always mean "literally". Some passages of Scripture are plainly not literal. Take for example John 6:35, in which Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." The Lord obviously did not mean He was a loaf of bread, to be literally munched and swallowed! Another example is Judges 9:8-15. There, Jotham said to the men of Shechem, "The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them. And they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!'"... It is obvious that this is figurative language. The meaning of the passage has to be sought from the context, which is our next rule.

Take the text in context

The second rule of interpretation is that we must take the text in context. Again, common sense and common practice demand this. Let us say you overhear someone shout, "Kill it!", at the same time that a cat runs out of the room. Without further investigation, you go straight to the police or the RSPCA (the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) and report that some people are trying to kill a cat. If you had taken the trouble to just peer into the room, you would have discovered that the people in the room were attempting to kill a cockroach! You did hear the words, "Kill it!", but you have taken those words out of context.

Consider Matthew 27:5, which says, "Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself." Who hanged himself, and why? Imagine what ridiculous doctrine might possibly come out of this passage if we do not bother to check the context! It is the failure to check the context that has led some churches to practise feet-washing, based on John 13:12-14. It is also the failure to understand a verse in context that has led the charismatics to claim that tongue-speaking may be practised for personal edification. They make this claim based on 1 Corinthians 14:4, which says, "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church." They have similarly misunderstood Mark 16:17, which says, "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues."

Compare scripture with scripture

The third rule is that we must compare scripture with scripture. Again this is a rule which we always use in everyday life, often without even thinking about it. Take, for example, the situation in which a man has left behind a will. One part of the will states that all his property is to be distributed to his children. When the property is being distributed, a cousin turns up and claims a share to it, saying that the word "children" can mean "relatives of the next generation". If the case is brought to court, the judge will go through the document to see how the word "children" is used elsewhere. Suppose he finds that in the first paragraph the names of the children are specified, and these are the immediate children of the deceased man. How do you think the judge will understand the word "children" in the paragraph that is controverted? Of course, the cousin will lose his case!

That is the way we must interpret Scripture. One part must be compared with another which speaks of the same matter. Otherwise, we might get the doctrine wrong. For example, we read in 1 Corinthians 8:4, "Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* no other God but one." From this we might draw the wrong conclusion that it is all right to eat food offered to idols, since "an idol is nothing in the world". However, we will draw a different conclusion when we consult 1 Corinthians 10:19-20, which says, "What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons."

You see now why it is so important to compare one part of Scripture with other parts. We know that our God is not a God of confusion. He will not contradict Himself by saying one thing in His word, and another thing in another part of His word.

These, then, are the basic rules of interpreting the Bible: take the text plainly, take the text in context, and compare scripture with scripture. By these three rules, we may come to a correct understanding of the Bible. This is because the Scripture may be clearly understood.

The Nature Of Revelation

The three basic rules of interpreting the Bible are enough for the average Christian to arrive at the correct understanding of a passage of Scripture. Books on how to interpret the Bible often give more rules than these three. The other rules, however, may be looked upon as refinements of the three basic ones we have learned - namely, to take the text plainly, to take the text in context, and to compare scripture with scripture.

We are concerned to know how Scripture should be interpreted because we believe that Scripture is the sole authority in all matters of faith and practice. Our understanding of the authority of Scripture in our lives will be enhanced if we understand the nature of revelation. Furthermore, the three basic rules of interpreting the Bible may be applied with greater facility if we understand how the different parts of the Bible relate to one another. Put another way, we wish to answer the questions, "How was Scripture given?", and "How do the different parts of the Bible relate to one another?"

The unity of God's word

The Bible was not dropped down from heaven complete. The prophets did not record the whole of the Bible at one sitting. Instead, God revealed His truth gradually, portion by portion, through the stages of the history of His people. When one part of the Bible was written down, it remained forever a part of God's word. When another portion of revelation was written down, the earlier portion did not become obsolete. One portion was added to another until the whole was complete.

The Bible is, in reality, a compilation of sixty-six books of various lengths. The first thirty-nine books, which form the Old Testament, are as much part of God's word as the twenty-seven books that form the New Testament. The process of revelation may be compared to the construction of a wall. The workers lay the bricks layer upon layer, so that all the layers are joined together to form a whole. All the bricks, and all the layers, may be likened to the different books and the different time in which they were written. Once complete, we see the wall as one solid slab. The later layers have been fused to the earlier layers, to form a complete wall.

The Old Testament and the New Testament *together* constitute God's word. We must not exalt one at the expense of the other. Throughout the history of the church, there have been many who did just that. We find this tendency prevalent among many good Christians today. Among Christians, the more common tendency is to exalt the New Testament above the Old. The claim is sometimes made that the Old Testament is obsolete. It has been superseded by the New. The New Testament is all that we need to live the Christian life. This, of course, is wrong because the whole of the Bible is God's word, not just the New Testament.

In the New Testament, we find many portions of the Old Testament quoted. The Lord quoted from the Old Testament, and so did the apostles. Our understanding of the New Testament will be deficient if we fail to see the significance of the Old Testament passages that are quoted. Moreover, we would have failed to see God as the God of history. We all know the importance of a sense of history. When a person does not know where he is from, he will have difficulty knowing where he is heading. He will not have a clear sense of purpose for his life. That is why we find that every great civilization has a clear record of its history. That is why every strong nation will teach its people its own history.

What is the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments? Someone has stated it well: "The New Testament is in the Old concealed, and the Old Testament is by the New revealed." The way of salvation is clearly revealed to us in the New Testament. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. By His death on the cross of Calvary, He has borne the sins of all His people. He rose from death to give eternal life to all who repent of their sins and trust in Him. This message, however, is also contained in the Old Testament, although it is not so clearly stated. We see it, for example, in Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." This is widely recognized as a prophecy concerning the coming of Christ, who was "bruised in the heel" in His death, but who bruised Satan's head in His resurrection.

The teachings of the New Testament are concealed in the Old Testament, and the teachings of the Old Testament are revealed by the New Testament. We will have difficulty understanding the significance of the Old Testament sacrifices if it were not for the clearer revelation given to us in the book of Hebrews. The Jews in the time of the apostles had difficulty understanding the prophecies concerning the coming Saviour, until the apostles persuaded them of Christ. The New Testament sheds light on the teachings of the Old Testament.

We see now the importance of holding to the unity of the Bible.

Progressive clarity and completeness

Since Scripture was given cumulatively and progressively, we must recognize that revelation became increasingly clear and complete. When interpreting the Scripture, we must not adopt a "static theology" in which no allowance is made for progression in revelation. This is a common mistake made by some good Christians. While other Christians have the tendency of exalting the New Testament above the Old, these have the tendency to adopt a "static theology". They mentally equate the Old Testament with the New. They then impose upon the Old Testament scriptures the teachings of the New Testament or, more commonly, they do the reverse of imposing upon the New Testament scriptures the teachings of the Old.

Since the New Testament came after the Old Testament, we naturally expect the teachings in the New Testament to be clearer. We also expect the practices established in the New Testament to be **normative**, that is, setting the norm for us to follow today. The Old Testament, for example, shows that the Jews were God's chosen people and He dealt with them as a nation (Deuteronomy 14:1-2). In the New Testament, the people of God are all who believe in Christ, and He deals with them as local churches (Hebrews 8:7-13; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18). In the Old Testament, adulterers were stoned to death. In the New Testament, corrective discipline is to be exercised in the churches (John 8:1-12; 1 Corinthians 5).

Even within each of the Testaments, progression is seen and must be recognized. In the Old Testament, prophecies of the coming Saviour became clearer and clearer with time. It also became clearer that true spirituality has nothing to do with natural descent nor with the keeping of religious rituals, and that God was going to call not only Jews, but also Gentiles, to be His people (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Isaiah 2:1-4; 42; 53; 60; etc.). When extended to the New Testament, we see it clearly taught in Galatians 3 that the true children of Abraham, the true people of God, are all those who have faith in Jesus Christ.

Progression of revelation is seen also within the New Testament. In John 16:13-15, the Lord promised the coming of the Holy Spirit, who will lead His disciples to further truths. We see this fulfilled in Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, when the first New Testament church came into being. As local churches were established, elders were appointed (Acts 14:23). The pastoral epistles, which were written towards the end of Paul's life, give the qualifications of men who may be appointed to be elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1). The normative church order is thus established.

We see a similar unfolding of the Great Commission of Matthew 28: 18-20. The Old Testament had prophesied the salvation of the Gentiles. We see now how this is to be accomplished. The Lord had foretold, before His death and resurrection, that He would draw all nations to Himself when He was lifted up (John 12:32). The resurrected Christ now gave this commission to His disciples. This command is repeated in Acts 1:8, with the explicit description that the gospel is to be preached farther and farther afield, in a widening circle. The travels of Philip and Peter (Acts 8:5; 9:32ff.), and the missionary journeys of Paul, confirm to us the right understanding of the Great Commission - that it is a command given to local churches, to plant other local churches, to establish them in the teachings of the Lord, and to be carried out for all time.

Once this truth is grasped - namely, that the word of God was given with increasing clarity and completeness - we will not fall into the trap of equating the Old Testament with the New. We will not commit the error of resurrecting the Passover feast to be celebrated by Christians today, as has happened in a church in Malaysia. The Passover feast pointed to Christ's sacrificial death on the cross,

and is not to be celebrated by Christians anymore (1 Corinthians 5:7-8; Hebrews 10:10, 18). Instead, we celebrate the Lord's supper, which is a new ordinance of the new covenant. We will not have "tarrying meetings", hoping for a repetition of Pentecost, in which the sound of roaring wind was heard and tongues of fire seen. That belonged to the transition period between the old dispensation and the new, when the first New Testament churches were born. We will also not be surprised to learn that the Scripture actually teaches the cessation of the revelatory gifts when, the revelation of God was completed (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). We know that the revelation of God to us became complete with the writing of the last book of the Bible - the book of Revelation.

These, then, are the implications of the truth that Scripture was given cumulatively and progressively - firstly, we must hold to the unity of Scripture; and secondly, we must understand that God's word was given with increasing clarity and completeness.

Conclusion

We must complete this study on the authority of by drawing three practical conclusions.

Trust the word

Firstly, we must trust the word of God. The word of God is described as "the sword of the Spirit" in Ephesians 6:17. We are commanded to put on the whole armour of God so that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Of all the pieces of armour mentioned, this is the only one that is offensive in nature. God has provided us not only the defensive weapons but also this offensive one. Otherwise, like the soldier in battle, we will be shot at, hit, poked and knocked down often by the devil, with no offensive weapon at hand to keep him off. Like our Lord, when He was tempted in the wilderness by the devil (Matthew 4:1-11), we are able to use the sword of the Spirit to drive away our adversary.

Imagine now that in the midst of a particularly fierce battle, your sword crosses that of the adversary. You hear a sharp snap and realizes that a sword is broken. As you look down on the ground you find, indeed, the blade of a broken sword. As you look at your hand, to your horror you discover that it is your own sword that is broken! We do not want such a situation to happen to us. We do not wish to wield an untrustworthy sword - not in the midst of our spiritual struggle with the devil! Thank God. the sword He has equipped us with is a trustworthy one. His word is sure and true. It will not fail us. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. We must trust His word!

Study the word

Secondly, we must make every effort to study the word of God. What is the use of keeping our Bible nicely displayed on the shelf? The Bible is meant to be read. Scripture is capable of being clearly understood. If no effort is made to understand the word of God, no good will come to us. We know that the Holy Spirit works by the word. He enlightens us to understand the word, and He works in us by the word. Those who do not exert effort to study the word cannot expect to have the blessings of the Spirit of God.

The Lord declares that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). The Bible also tells us that every believer is expected to become a teacher of the word - some perhaps to become preachers, others to become Sunday schools teachers, and all of us to be able to instruct our children (Hebrews 5:12-14). If effort is not made to study the Bible, if time is not spent reading the Bible daily, if you do not come to church regularly to hear the word of God proclaimed, how are you ever to grow to spiritual maturity?

Live according to the word

Trust the word we must! Study the word we must! Do not forget, next, the importance of living according to the word. There are too many people who profess faith in Christ, but do not live according to His word. There are others who spoil their witness to the unbelieving world by their inconsistent life. When a Christian fails to live up to what he professes to believe in, he will not make an impact upon his unconverted friends. How we need to grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18)! If you love the Lord, you will keep His word (John 14:21-24).

This applies to the church as much as it applies to the individual Christian. If the Scripture is the sole authority in all matters of faith and practice, we will not want to insist upon our own opinions and our traditional practices. We will want to follow the teaching of the Bible, and discard all man-made methods of worship and church government. This is what has been called *the regulative principle*. We allow the Bible to regulate our lives.

Trust the word of God! Study the word of God! Live according to the word of God!

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