

Dear Friends,

Bible students generally agree that 2 Timothy was Paul's final letter, likely written shortly before his martyrdom. In a manner of speaking, it is his "Last will and testament," written in the moment for Timothy and for all future believers, and especially young--or old--preachers.

Where do we find the right answers to our questions about God and spiritual things, about how to face the growing darkness in this "*Present evil world*"? (Galatians 1:4 KJV) We cannot find those answers in a secret truth that only a few people know. We cannot find it in the latest philosophies that appear in governmental institutions or laws. Nor can we find it in a particular political candidate or party. As Paul contemplated his imminent death, he directed Timothy, and us, to the one God-given reliable source of guidance and truth

for our faith and for our lives. He did not write Timothy to look to Scripture plus any other teaching. He directed the young preacher to "**All scripture...**" for his instruction and for his often-needed "Course correction" in his spiritual journey. I need both; don't you?

In 1 Timothy 3:15, Paul reminded Timothy that the church is the "**house of God.**" In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, he reminds the young preacher and us, that "**All scripture**" is the "Book of God." The wise and faithful believer longs to spend much time in God's house and with God's Book. It is in both of these amazing resources that the conscientious believer finds the path of fellowship with God and with His family.

We live in a confusing age for naive and unstudied believers. Instead of only one "Church," one "House of God," as it existed in the early first century, you find a plethora of diverse groups, all claiming to follow the Bible,

all claiming to be that church, but all teaching very different ideas. When Paul confronted the Galatians for what many contemporary believers might regard as a fairly minor error, he rebuked them for believing in another Jesus and following another gospel. What would he say about this endless diversity in our day?

I offer that the Book we call the Bible (I use only the King James Bible without apology) informs our inquiry. A group of people may call themselves "Church" or the "house of God" by Biblical authority only to the extent they maintain that they serve in God's house, not their own, so they need to serve in that house by God's direction from His Book, not by their personal opinions or philosophies, and definitely not by their "wrested" misinterpretation of that Book. (2 Peter 3:16 KJV)

We need Paul's final letter for our faith no less than Timothy needed it for his ongoing ministry and personal faith. Are we willing to impose the filter of God's Book onto our minds--and onto our ears--to believe and to follow those teachings alone? In Luke 8:18, Jesus taught us to filter our own minds and motives, to "*...take heed **how** ye hear.*" In Mark 4:24, He taught us to filter what we hear, "*take heed **what** ye hear.*" If we follow Jesus' teaching, we shall diligently examine our motives and commitment to Jesus, to "How" we hear. We shall also impose a filter onto our minds and ears, wholly avoiding ideas and teachings that deviate from Jesus' Book, or that wrest those teachings. If a teaching does not shine its spotlight of emphasis onto Jesus, Author and Finisher of our faith, not on our faith or on our personal accomplishments, we should wisely avoid hearing it at all.

The longer I live the more I am convinced that life is too short to flirt with endless opinions and wrestings of Bible teaching. Consequently, I find myself spending more time with my Bible and less time with other writings. This week's study passage explains why.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

2 Timothy

[But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 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 perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works]. (2 Timothy 3:14-17 KJV 1900)

If you had good reason to believe that your life would soon end, how would you choose to spend your last hours or days? Based on Paul's words in 2 Timothy, especially in 2 Timothy 4:6-8, we may conclude that Paul fully expected to be executed by the Roman authorities imminently. His first "imprisonment" was a respectful house arrest in which he could enjoy certain liberties. In this imprisonment, he was likely held in a true Roman prison with no liberties other than a few occasional visitors. We might refer to 2 Timothy as Paul's "Swan song." Technically, swans do not sing; they whistle or hiss. However, an ancient English belief, going back as far as Chaucer, held that a swan sang a beautiful song just before it died, the origin of the term

as we know it. Instead of fret and dread his execution or rehearse regrets, Paul devoted his final hours to ministering to Timothy and reaching out to encourage as many of his friends as possible. Consider the following verse as one of Paul's closing thoughts to Timothy in this letter.

And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (2 Timothy 4:18 KJV 1900)

Oh, to face our final hours with such a mindset, especially when those last hours are not idyllic at all.

Although Paul faithfully and repeatedly reminds his readers of the inspiration and supreme authority of Scripture throughout his letters, our study verses stand at the head of this list. Knowing that he would no longer be available to

respond to teach Timothy or to answer his questions, Paul reminded Timothy of the one faithful and reliable source to guide him and future generations of believers till the Second Coming.

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them. Authentic Christian faith and service is not a never-ending progression of “New discoveries” or an evolving body of beliefs. Godly faith rests on the shoulders of our faithful God and His fixed—to borrow a Bible word, “immutable”—personal revelation of Himself and His truth (There is no other truth!) to His people. That revelation we discover in our Bible, not in our imagination or creative guesses about God and truth. Our divine assignment, no less than Timothy’s, is to learn and continue in those teachings.

...knowing of whom thou hast learned them. In certain theological traditions, Bible

teachers presume to be the controllers of “Assurance” for all who learn under their influence. We all long for more assurance, so this tactic becomes a powerful vehicle by which to control and manipulate people. Scripture teaches that our true and reliable source of assurance is in the ministry of the Holy Spirit, including this passage. If we ask the question, “Of whom did Timothy learn his spiritual heritage?” Timothy’s mother and grandmother early taught him from Old Testament Scriptures. Paul taught the young preacher more spiritual lessons than we know. However, Paul pushes this envelop to a much deeper level. Timothy’s spiritual learning, like yours and mine, originated with the indwelling Holy Spirit, the right answer to this question.

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. What is the correct divine intent or purpose of Scripture? Paul

answered that question. Scripture doesn't save people from the eternal consequences of their sins. It rather enlightens us to the reality of that truth, but only when/if we maintain our faith "...***in Christ Jesus.***" Put your faith anywhere else, and you choose ignorance of the faith that is in Jesus. Much of the teaching in our Christian culture teaches folks that they should have faith in their faith for their salvation. Faith in one's faith is not the same as faith in Jesus. Only faith anchored in the successful atoning work of Jesus leads us to the right view of Scripture's message.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for.... Paul would soon "Depart," so Timothy could not seek his wise counsel for future questions or problems in his faith or in his godly teaching of the churches. Like each of us, Timothy needed a reliable and enduring source of information for his faith.

Frequent contemporary teaching from this lesson changes the verb tense of the lesson to “All scripture **was** given by inspiration of God,” teaching that translation and copy errors compromised those writings so that we do not presently have the same impeccable revelation of God-inspired writings that Paul commended to Timothy. I do not question that some translations and copy errors have occurred over the centuries since those writings originated. However, I prefer to rest on the actual wording of Paul’s writing to Timothy, not alter it. Not only did God providentially guide the original writing of Scripture, but He also continues to preserve it so that the Bible we hold in our hands (Without apology, I refer to my KJV, not to one of the various revisions on the market) continues to be just as pure and effectual for the four stated purposes in our study passage as they were when written. Occasionally, critics of the Bible will raise an Old Testament passage where a person’s

age, or other details do not agree with that information in another passage. I ask a simple question. Paul stated four specific reasons for which God inspired the Scriptures. If we simply accept that the two records in this instance do not agree, which of the four stated reasons for Scripture does this point compromise or diminish? Not one! My faith is not at all weakened in the specific terms of those four purposes if two Old Testament records do not agree on an ancient king's age or other details. My faith does not collapse if I read "spirit" in a passage when it should read "Spirit" as a reference to the Spirit of God. Context will always inform the identity of the intended "Spirit," whether the word is capitalized or not.

Historically, the conscientious Bible reading community has been a competent monitor of the occasional printing or translation errors that occurred. I love this example. A Bible published in 1631 was

intended to be a copy of the 1611 King James Bible. However, apparently the typesetters omitted a word. In Exodus 20:14, in Moses' original giving of the Ten Commandments to Israel, instead of reading, "Thou shalt **not** commit adultery," it read, "Thou shalt commit adultery." Upon release of this Bible, the devoted Bible reading Christian community almost immediately noticed the error. They quickly named this edition "The Wicked Bible" or "The Adulterer's Bible." And just as quickly, this Bible was replaced with the corrected edition. Our God jealously protects His word for His people, as He promised in Psalm 12:6-7. The present tense verb in our study passage, "...**is given**," affirms this idea of God's personal giving **and** preservation of His words to His people. Instead of fretting over a difference in someone's age, the spelling of an ancient person's name, or the upper or lower case of a word, we should read our Bibles with Paul's four stated

reasons for God's giving of Scripture firmly implanted in our minds.

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Consider the context of this thought. Paul wrote his final letter to Timothy in which he acknowledged that his time was short. He has been Timothy's father in the faith and in the ministry. If Paul is gone, where will Timothy look for instruction and direction? Whether Timothy in the first century or you and me today, if we strive to be a man or woman of God, to learn and to grow in our faith, we have one enduring and reliable source to which we must look. It hasn't changed. Nor has it been compromised or lost. If God regards whatever we hope to accomplish in our faith, or in our church, as a good work, we may find it repeatedly and clearly taught in our Bible. If we allow our human imagination to compromise our faith and tickle our fancy for something else—however good we may regard it—that we

cannot find in our New Testament, we need wisely to pause and go back to our New Testament. If we can't find that idea clearly and repeatedly taught there, godly wisdom dictates that we should let it go and turn our passion back to Scripture and its teachings as our exclusive guide. A word of caution. Over time we all develop our own version of "Sacred cows," things that we regard as too important and desirable, but not supported or taught in the New Testament. To borrow from that cliché, as we study and seek to follow New Testament teaching alone, we need to load up those sacred cows onto a raft and send them "Down the river." Be careful not to enshrine any idea or habit as your sacred cow that is not clearly taught in our New Testament.

Our study passage also addresses and answers a key question that contemporary Christians often ignore. ***To whom is Scripture addressed?*** When the Holy Spirit directed the writing of our

Scriptures, for whom did He intend the words, the message, of those writings? If we allow this lesson to answer the question instead of our private ideas and beliefs, we learn the answer. “...***that the man of God may be....***” God did not intend His Book to be a message to lost sinners to show them a road map they might follow to save themselves from their sins. He intended this Book for His own children, for already-saved people who strive to learn more about their God and Savior, who He is, His character, and His work; what He has done and is doing for His people, and how He commands us, His people, to conduct our lives in this present evil world. And, folks, that Book commands us to be—in our minds and in our conduct—a light in a dark world. (Matthew 5:14-16 KJV) We can’t honor our God and His teaching us to be good representatives and examples of His light while we run headlong to imitate the world around us. We must immerse our hearts and minds in His

Book, in His ways and teachings, and we must strive to learn and to live by His teachings, not by our favorite philosophy. Many conservative Christians in our culture have forgotten this basic Biblical teaching, so it is no surprise that they—that we—have also lost our godly influence on the culture in which we live. We are not that light! Are we willing to ship our personal sacred cows down the river and return to our God and His word for our life-guide?

In 2 Timothy 4:18, quoted above, Paul voiced full confidence and reliance on the Lord's care and keeping of him in the face of "*every evil work.*" Have we learned that lesson? Do we trust our Lord to preserve us from the evil of the dark world in which we live? Or do we look to our own ideas, strategies, and works?

Paul's "Swan Song" contains a treasure trove of truth that the Lord's people need in our day. Lord help us to go back to

that Christ-centric truth for our deliverance
and for our joy.

Elder Joe Holder