

Title: Key to Understanding Scripture

Text: 2 Timothy 3: 13-17

Date: November 26, 2014

Place: SGBC, New Jersey

2 Timothy 3: 13: But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. 14: But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned *them*; 15: 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. 16: All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

I read that from Thanksgiving through the first week of the New Year more people read the Bible than any other time of the year. After reading that survey, it made me want to speak to you about a few “basics” concerning the scriptures.

Do you have a regularly scheduled time for reading the scriptures? It is good to schedule time, every day, all year long, to read the Bible. We do well to teach our children the scriptures. The apostle Paul commended Timothy for knowing the scriptures from his youth. He said why it is important to know the scriptures. Paul said, “which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus...that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

As a child, Timothy was probably taught the scriptures by his grandmother and mother. Paul said, “I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.” (2Ti 1:5)

What a beautiful illustration of how God works to teach his elect through those he has saved, through the scriptures. By God’s grace, God gave Timothy’s grandmother Lois faith to believe on Christ. She taught the scriptures to her daughter, Eunice, Timothy’s mother. By his grace, God gave Eunice life and the gift of faith to believe on Christ. From his youth, Lois and Eunice taught Timothy the scriptures. So when Timothy heard the apostle Paul preaching the gospel, the scripture was familiar to Timothy. God gave Timothy faith to believe on Christ. That is a beautiful example of Proverbs 22: 6 which says, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

I commend you faithful fathers and mothers for coming to hear the gospel preached, and insisting your children come with you. Here you are on a snowy Wednesday night. Then after hearing the gospel preached, we, together with our children, should study what we hear by looking these things up in the scriptures. Many of you have asked to receive my sermon notes so you can continue to study what you hear. For that purpose, I send them to anyone who wants them. Why? When God graciously gives a seeking heart then those who walk in that light are honored by God giving more light. The Bereans are an example.

Acts 17: 11: These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. 12: Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

But with all this in mind, do you know the key to understanding scripture? It is not enough to simply hear the gospel or to read the scriptures. We must understand and believe what we hear and read in the scriptures. In order, to do so we must know the key to understanding scripture. That is our subject: The Key to Understanding Scripture. Understanding scripture has some of the key elements involved when reading a personal letter.

FROM WHOM IS THE WORD WRITTEN?

First, we must understand from whom the word is written. The Bible is the word of Holy God. The Holy Spirit uses the apostle Paul to write, “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God.” (2 Tim 3: 16) The scriptures are “the oracles of God.” (Ro 3:2). It means the scriptures are the utterances of God, the words of God. No other religious book is the word of God. The Bible is the only book which is the word of God.

Some argue that the Bible are the words of men. God used men to pen the words of this book. But these are not the words of men. Men wrote what God dictated to them through the Spirit of God. David was used to pen the Psalms. Also, his writings are in many other places in the Bible. David said, “The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word *was* in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me.” (2 Sam 23: 2-3)

Some argue, “If I could see God then I might believe this is the word of God.” The apostle Peter walked with God and spake to God face-to-face. He was with the Lord Jesus when Christ was transfigured and saw Christ in his glory. But Peter said this about the scriptures,

2 Peter 1: 19: We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: 20: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. 21: For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost.

Faith believes God. Faith does not need proof or evidence. But one proof that the Bible is the very word of God is seen in that this book creates a reaction in men which no other book does. In everyone’s conscience, these words either stir up enmity against God or stir up faith and hope in God. Even just the thought of reading or hearing this book manifests what dominates a person’s heart. When you only mention this book, some immediately become uncomfortable, offended or defensive. They want to change the subject. Others desire to hear and are greatly comforted by this word. No other book creates that immediate, certain response in people like the word of God. Why?

Hebrews 4: 12: For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The immediate reaction of all men to this book shows that this book really is the very word of holy God. So first, the key to understanding this book is to receive it as it is: the words of holy God—the very God before whom you and I shall stand in the day of judgment. One fault for which the Lord Jesus condemned men was this, “Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.” (Mt 22:29) So “ye do well that ye take heed!”

OF WHOM IS THE WORD WRITTEN?

Secondly, the key to understanding the scriptures is to understand of whom it is written. The book is concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This whole book is concerning God’s glory and righteousness manifest in the Lord Jesus Christ in the salvation of his people.

Luke 24: 27: And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself....44: And he said unto them, These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me.

The Old Testament scriptures declare Christ is coming and will succeed. God told the devil in the garden, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” (Gen 3: 15) The first blood shed after the fall declared Christ and the work Christ would accomplish, “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.” (Ge 3:21)

Christ was typified in Abel’s lamb by whose blood Abel found acceptance with God. Christ is the Prophet like unto Moses. He is the High Priest like unto Melchisedec. Christ is typified in the brazen serpent which was made the thing destroying his people and lifted up, to whom the people looked and lived. Christ is the smitten Rock, from whose stripes the water of life flows freely to his people. He is the Passover Lamb, who when God sees his blood passes over his people who are under his blood, believing on him.

In all the ceremonies it is Christ glorified: in the Temple, the Lamb, the Blood, the Altar, the High Priest, and the Mercy Seat. They were all pictures to glorify Christ. The prophecies are all written concerning him and what he would fulfill. The Psalms are all written of him. The Old Testament declares Christ is coming.

In the New Testament, the four gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—declare he is here. We behold Christ made of a woman, made under the law. In Christ Jesus we behold God in human flesh in the manger, growing up, and living amongst his people. We behold him calling his apostles and establishing his church. Then we behold him laying down his life for his sheep on the cross, obtaining eternal redemption for us. Throughout the New Testament we behold him—him—him. John the Baptist said, “Behold the Lamb of God!” He is here!

Then the message of the epistles is that he is now reigning from God’s right hand and in his church, calling out his lost sheep through the gospel and that he shall soon return. Together with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, it is Christ sending his preachers; it is Christ preaching in the gospel; it is Christ calling out his people; it is Christ growing and preserving his people; it is Christ who will return when the last lost sheep is called out!

Concerning all sinners in Adam, the message of the book is, “All flesh is grass.” Christ said, “The flesh profits nothing.” Our flesh is not righteous, we are sin. We are law-breakers by Adam and by our own transgression. Our nature is unholy by Adam’s seed. Our flesh will not and cannot seek God; our flesh cannot understand the word of God or receive the good news therein. All flesh is unprofitable grass. So when we read scripture, hear it putting you and me in the dust. Do not read it thinking God is telling you how you can have life by your hand. He is not.

Concerning God in Christ the message of the book is, “Thy God reigneth.” In eternity, God chose a people and gave the whole work of their salvation into the hands of his Son. Each of God’s elect enter the world sinners so we had to have our sin put away. We had to be made righteousness for God to be just and justifier and for God to receive us.

God gave the whole work to Christ to accomplish. One of the scriptures, which will help you understand all other scriptures is found in Isaiah 42: 4, “[Christ] shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.”

Read the word of God hearing it declare you a dead, dying, dung-dwelling sinner. And hear it declaring the glory of the triune God in Christ Jesus saving his people who shall not fail! Here these two things in every scripture and you will have the key to the book. Christ Jesus said to some, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” (Jn 5: 39-40)

TO WHOM IS THE WORD WRITTEN?

Thirdly, the key to understanding the Bible is to know to whom it is written. When you receive a letter the first thing you do is look to see to whom the letter is written. Likewise, when we read the Bible, first thing we should do, is look to see to whom the letter is written. The epistles throughout the New Testament are letters. They are letters inspired of God; letters penned by the apostles of Christ. And each letter is written to a particular people.

The letter to the Romans is written, “To all that be in Rome.” Does that mean Paul is writing to everybody in Rome? Does that mean it is not to anyone in our day? If we stopped there, we would answer, yes. But he qualifies who the “all” are to whom he is writing. He wrote, “To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints.” (Rom 1: 7) The epistle to the Romans was written to all in Rome who were believers: beloved of God, called by God’s grace, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Though we are not citizens of Rome we can apply this letter to ourselves, if we are ‘beloved of God, called by God and sanctified by God.’ God declares we can if we meet those qualifications, “By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name: Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ.” (Rom 1: 5-6)

To whom were the Corinthian letters written? We read in the first letter that it is written, “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours [Lord].” (1 Cor 1: 2) So the things written in this letter, concerning God’s blessings and salvation, apply to believers, both at Corinth and in our day.

So you get the point, if you go through the letters in the New Testament, you will find, God is using believers to write to believers, both then and now.

When you receive a letter addressed to you, do you apply the things written unto everyone in the world? No, the letter is not written to them. We only apply our personal letters to those to whom they are written. We should do the same with the Bible.

Therefore, when you read the Bible and you read of God’s blessing to “the world”, or “all”, or “all of us”, it is a mistake to apply God’s blessings to everyone in the world without exception.

First, see who it is written unto—in the epistle itself or in context. Also, compare scripture with scripture—it has to be consistently true throughout. Furthermore, pay attention to the meaning being declared in the passage. In these ways, God qualifies who “the world” and the “all” are of whom he is speaking.

For example, in the second letter to Corinth, Paul is writing to the saints: sanctified by the Father’s divine election, by Christ’s blood, by his Spirit. Also, by comparing scripture with scripture, we know Christ said, “I lay down my life for the sheep.” He said to some, “Ye are not my sheep.” Furthermore, by considering the meaning of the words in the text, we understand who it has to speak of. He wrote, “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead.” It means when Christ laid down his life all those who were in Christ by divine election died in Christ. “And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.” The “all” are those which are risen with Christ, made alive by God the Holy Spirit, who live unto Christ rather than unto themselves. “Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.” The “all” for whom Christ died are all who have been reconciled by God into peace and communion with God. So it cannot mean Christ died for all men without exception. If one man is in hell it means Christ did not die for all men. All for whom

Christ died are reconciled to God and shall be reconciled in their hearts when God quickens them to life and faith. "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." "The world" for whom Christ died are those to whom God will not impute sin. That means they are righteous before God and cannot be condemned or lost but must be saved. So that rules out "the world" meaning all men without exception. How was the sin of the "all" and "the world" put away? How are they made the righteousness of God? "For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Cor 5: 15-21) We call on all sinners to be reconciled to God because we do not know who the elect are. But through the gospel, the Holy Spirit shall quicken those Christ redeemed and they shall come to Christ in faith.

The key to understanding to whom the word applies is to see who it is written to while paying attention to the context, comparing scripture with scripture. Also, pay attention to the meaning of the words in the text. By these things, we know the "us", the "we", the "all", "the world" of whom Paul writes are God's elect, Christ's sheep, those sanctified by God, those reconciled into peace with God by Christ, those who God will not charge with sin, those who are and shall be made the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

But if we apply the blessings of God to every blind, God-hating rebel in the world, it is as foolish as if we received a letter from a friend written personally to us then applied it to every person in our neighborhood. God's blessings are toward his people in Christ. God has nothing to say to unbelieving, rebels, except to warn them to repent and believe on Christ, or they shall be found under the wrath to come, if they meet God in unbelief outside of Christ. Apply the same rule to the Bible as we apply to our own personal letters and it will help us understand who God is speaking of in the passages which false preachers use to apply to all men without exception.

Remember this, all blessings A-Z are given, confirmed and made effectual by God and shall never be in vain. He loses none whom he purposed to save. Those who Christ redeemed and reconciled by his precious blood, the Spirit shall regenerate to faith and none shall be lost. We saw in Paul's first letter to Corinth that he was writing to believers. A few verses later he speaks of God's blessings. So here is what God does for all believers.

1 Corinthians 1: 4: I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; 5: That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and *in* all knowledge; 6: Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: 7: So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ 8: Who shall also confirm you unto the end, *that ye may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9: God *is* faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Read this book knowing it is the word of holy God. It is concerning the Son of God, Christ Jesus. And concerning all blessings of God, it is written to God's elect, Christ's redeemed, those regenerated and kept by the Holy Spirit. Christ said, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." (Jn 7: 17) Believe on Christ and this book will open up like never before!

Amen!