

Absolute Truth Breathed from God to Us

A Brief Study of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 -- Part 2

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In our first lesson, we contemplated the miracle of God communicating to man, by His grace and mercy, toward sinful men and women. He would not have had to do that. He could have destroyed His rebellious creation, but He chose out of His attribute of love, because it is His nature, to offer redemption full and free through His Son, Jesus Christ. By His blood, fallen creatures, wretches such as we were, can be restored to fellowship with our Creator. Christ's work of redemption, justification, and propitiation provided atonement for those who repent and believe in Him! All this was accomplished by the Living Word. Through His written Word, which is a love letter from God to us, every word and thought that God wanted us to know was "breathed out" to **"men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God"** (2 Peter 1:21).

Now we will examine some of the reasons Scripture was given to men. Besides the ultimate reason that we might be redeemed by regeneration, we can see in the remainder of 2 Timothy 3:16 that all Scripture is **"profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness."**

I want to quote 2 Timothy 3:16 from the Amplified Bible here to help the student get a clearer understanding of these terms. It reads like this: **"All Scripture is God-breathed [given by divine inspiration] and is profitable for instruction, for conviction [of sin], for correction [of error and restoration to obedience], for training in righteousness [learning to live in conformity to God's will, both publically and privately -- behaving honorably with personal integrity and moral courage]."**

Let us now zoom in and examine more closely the terms used here by the Holy Spirit through the human author Paul as he wrote to educate and encourage young Timothy.

The first word which stands out in verse 16b is the word **"profitable."** It is the Greek word **"ophelimos,"** (pronounced "o - fel' - ee - mos"). The word means "useful, profitable, serviceable, helpful, beneficial and refers to that which yields advantageous returns or results. It provides something that one needs to attain a certain goal -- in context, to be 'a man of God.'" The word occurs three times in the New Testament. All three occurrences of the word are by Paul in his epistles to Titus and Timothy. 1 Timothy 4:8 and Titus 3:8 are the other verses in which the word is used. In the 1 Timothy 4 passage, Paul uses the word to emphasize the contrast of the temporal value of exercise of the physical body versus the eternal value of godliness, which not only has temporal benefits but eternal value as well. In the Titus passage Paul was emphasizing the value of doing good deeds, stating that those good deeds were **"profitable for men."**

When we think of the Holy Scriptures being "profitable," consider the words of John Wesley: "I want to know one thing -- the way to Heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach the way. He hath written it down in a book. Oh, give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri* : 'A man of the book.' Here then, I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone; only God is here. In His presence I open, I read His book; for this end -- to find the way to Heaven." We search for profit and pleasure our whole lives, yet the greatest profit and the fulfillment which surpasses the fleeting moments of pleasure is the rich inheritance of belonging to the great Creator God of the universe who has chosen us before the foundation of the world to be co-heirs of Christ and to be in intimate fellowship with Him in Paradise forever! I think of the song, "And Can It Be?" by Charles Wesley, brother of John Wesley. Meditate on the words from verses 4 and 5 and the refrain:

**Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray--
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.**

**No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th' eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.**

**Amazing Love, How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?**

The rest of verse 16 lists the four things which Scripture is profitable, or useful for: **"for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness."**

The first is **"teaching."** It should be obvious, and yet many of the churches in our modern culture seem to forget that teaching the Word should be one of the main goals in the church, not political and social agendas or "feel good talks." The word for "teaching" here is **"didaskalia,"** (pronounced "did - os - kal - ee' - ah). Of the 13 verses which contain the word in the New Testament, all are used by Paul in his epistles with the exception of Matthew 15:9 and Mark 7:7 where both texts read "But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as **doctrines** the precepts of men" (emphasis mine). The word is translated thirteen times as either **"doctrine," "doctrines,"** or **"instruction."** In eight verses, it is translated as **"teaching"** or **"teachings."** In our passage, the KJV and NKJV have translated the word as **"doctrine."** The Amplified has **"instruction."** The ESV, the NIV, the HCSB and NASB all have translated the word as **"teaching."** The word means "either the act of teaching or the thing taught, and in this use denotes doctrine, or what is taught. 'Doctrine' is from the Latin word 'doctrina' which, in turn, is from 'doceo,' which means 'to teach.' It refers primarily to that which is taught, not the method of teaching and doctrine" (definition from Precept Austin scholars). So, as we ponder the command from Timothy which lists the four things which Scripture is used for, the first is an emphasis on doctrine and the action of teaching that doctrine to the people in the church.

On the subject of music in the church, contemplate what the late scholar and pastor Warren Wiersbe said about teaching within the songs we sing in church. He said, "Far too many songs not only teach no doctrine, but many even teach false doctrines. A singer has no more right to sing a lie than a teacher has to teach a lie" (from his Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor).

The second thing that Paul emphasized as an important use of Scripture is **"reproof."** It is **"elenchos,"** (pronounced "el' - eng - khos"). From the root word which means "bringing to light," it "describes the process or the action which brings something to the light, and so which scrutinizes or examines carefully, exposing and setting forth. In its purest form, "reproof" is an expression of strong disapproval. 'Elegchos' refers to the reproof of sin that comes as the Holy Spirit operates through the presentation of Scripture" (definition from Precept Austin). The word only occurs once in the New Testament, and that occurrence is right here in 2 Timothy 3:16. Young's Literal translation has **"conviction,"** while the Amplified has **"conviction [of sin]."** The team of 100 scholars who worked on the NIV rendered the word as **"rebuking."** Most other versions translate the word as **"reproof"** as does the NASB, KJV, NKJV, and ESV.

"Reproof" is like an umpire at a baseball game who tells you whether you are "out" or "safe." It tells us what is sin. God is the author of standards. His Word is *the* standard. Our modern world does not like the boundaries set by God in His Holy Word. But we, who are slaves of righteousness, have no excuse. We have a Heavenly Umpire who clearly spells out the rules for living, and this verse gives us the mandate to follow the Book!

The third useful thing Scripture provides for us is "**correction.**" It is the word "**epanorthosis,**" (pronounced ep - an - **or**' - tho - sis). It "literally means a straightening up again and thus a restoration of something to its original and proper condition" (from Precept Austin). Webster's 1828 dictionary defines correction as the act of "bringing back, from error or deviation, into conformity with a just standard . . . In Scriptural language, whatever tends to correct the moral conduct, and bring back from error or sin."

The fourth useful virtue which Scripture provides for the believer is "training in righteousness." The word for "training" is "**paideia,**" (pronounced "pie - **day**' - ah). It means "to provide instruction, with the intent of forming proper habits of behavior, of providing guidance for responsible living, of rearing and guiding a child toward maturity" (definition from Precept Austin). Proverbs 13:24 says "He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently."

Hebrews 12:5b-11 lends correlative power to the idea of training in righteousness:

"MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.'

"It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

All of these things which are useful from God's Word are for our training in righteousness. Even though we are made positionally righteous the moment we are born again, or saved, we progress in the Christian life "from milk to meat," as we mature. At the moment of salvation we were **positionally sanctified**, or "set apart." As we grow in our spiritual walk through life, we are **progressively sanctified**, or "set apart" as we mature and conform to the image of Jesus Christ. Ultimately then, we are **perfectly sanctified**, or "set apart" forever when we are glorified with the Lord, either when we die physically, or when He comes to gather His elect (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). In this lifelong process, we never reach a stage of perfection, but as we travel life's road, the Scriptures are our guide which require us to take action in pursuing all righteousness through the teaching and learning of Biblical doctrine, the acceptance of the Lord's rebuke, the humble obedience to correct what we need to correct, and finally the willingness to be trained by God's instruction manual, and be ready to teach others in our realm of influence. As Paul instructed Timothy earlier in this epistle, "**And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also**" (2 Timothy 2:2). "Men" is generic in the context, but ladies are not left out of the command, as they teach other women and children the things of God.

In our next and last lesson on these two verses, we will attempt to see the results and riches of following these commands for every believer as we unpack verse 17.