

## THE WORD OF GOD

There are two main guides that God has given us to show us how to live as Christians and to do His work in the world. They are the written Word of God (the Bible) and the Holy Spirit.

The Bible contains the primary record of God revealing Himself to Mankind since the Creation of the world. Here we have the story of Creation, the origin of the nations, God's special dealings with the nation of Israel, and finally the appearance of Jesus Christ on the earth -- including the things He taught, the things He did, and what happened as his disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to spread the good news to the world.

As a result, different parts of the Bible were written by different people at different times, and using different styles. But all of it was inspired by God Himself. As the Apostle Paul said,

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” *(2 Tim 3:16)*

Furthermore, large parts of the Bible contain the direct words of God as His Spirit came upon prophets who spoke in His name. The Apostle Peter says,

“For no prophecy ever had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” *(2 Peter 1:21)*

These Holy writings have now been translated into more than a thousand languages in the world so that as many people as possible can read and hear the words of God in their own language. If at all possible, you should try to get Bible, and begin to read it, or go to a place where it is read and taught. You may not understand everything at first, but start with the things you do understand and begin to do them. In addition to asking God for understanding, there is no greater key to understanding the Word of God than to do the things you learn. As you begin to walk in faith in this way, God will show you more and give you greater understanding of His heart, His will, and His words.<sup>1</sup>

Next you must understand the different parts of the Bible. The two main divisions of the Bible are the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament refers to the dealings of God prior to the time of Jesus, especially concerning the nation of Israel and the law of Moses.

<sup>1</sup>(Each book of the Bible is broken down by chapter numbers, and then further broken down by verse numbers. These are to help you find specific passages when studying or sharing the word of God with other people. A Bible reference like 2 Peter 1:19 means, “The second epistle of Peter, chapter 1, verse 19”. Sometimes the name of the book is abbreviated like “Pet” instead of Peter, or “Jn” instead on John. If you have a Bible you will find it helpful to memorize the names of the books of the Bible in order so that you can find passages quickly --especially in church or with friends who read and study the word of God with you.)

The New Testament refers to God's dealings with Mankind since the time of Jesus. The first four books of the New Testament are called the Gospels. They are named Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John after men who wrote them but each one of these Gospel accounts tell the story of Jesus. God used four different men so that as many as possible of the details of Jesus life would be included in the record. The Book of John was especially written to cover events and teachings that didn't get included in the first three books.

The Book of Acts tells about the coming of the Holy Spirit and the events that happened as the Gospel began to spread to the world. Then there are 19 letters (called epistles) that were written by the apostles of Christ to explain more about the Christian life and how to implement it on a daily basis. Finally, there is a book called Revelation concerning the events that will take place at the end of the world.

The New Testament is the part of the Bible you should start to read and to implement. This tells the essence of the spiritual birth in Christ and addresses matters of the heart in plain language. As soon as possible, you should also read Genesis, the very first book of the Bible, because it tells about many events that are referred to in the other books.

As you grow in faith you will understand more about the relationship between the Old Testament and the New. One important thing to understand now is that many of the events of the Old Testament are physical examples of the spiritual things we encounter as we live for Christ. The Israelites especially were tested by God as they traveled from Egypt to Canaan. God wanted to know if they would obey Him or not, and whether they would trust Him or complain. We face these same kinds of tests in our own circumstances. As the Apostle Paul wrote:

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. *(1 Cor 10:1-6, 11 NIV)*

When the Israelites were commanded to conquer their enemies, they had to physically do battle against ungodly nations. But the real enemies of our lives are those of the heart – Lust, jealousy, pride, foolishness, etc. *(Mk 7:20-22)*. In the New Testament God calls us to conquer these spiritual enemies, not with physical weapons, but with spiritual ones – replacing lies with truth, and resisting the devil through the power of Christ. As the Apostle Paul said,

The weapons of our warfare are not physical, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought captive to obedience to Christ. *(2 Cor 10:3-5)*

It is the New Testament by which we live today and it goes beyond the physical things to address the spiritual matters of the heart where sin really starts. As the Apostle Peter said:

“...We have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. *(2 Peter 1:19 NIV)*

But keep in mind that all Scripture is inspired by God and can be used by Him to address the matters of your heart and life. Ask God for the spiritual understanding of the things you read. He will give you the Holy Spirit so that you can understand his word. (*1 Cor 2:12-16*)

The Bible is not like other books. It is the Living Word of God. Do not attempt to use it if you are not sincerely trying to learn God's ways. And do not attempt to use it for your own selfish purposes. (*2 Pet 3:16*) The word of God is meant to reveal God to you and to show you how to live. It is not a magic book or book of formulas. It is a message of God's love for Mankind, and how He desires for us to be redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to us by our forefathers and to be made new in His image through the blood of Jesus and the power of His Spirit. Then we will be the people of God on this earth with clean hands and a pure heart, shining the light of Christ in this world as we live for Him. It is in seeking the fulfillment of this message that God will reveal to us the truth of the Bible.

Finally, you should understand that the Bible is the final authority in matters relating to God. There are many religions on earth, and many people have different ideas about God, but the Bible is the historical record of what He has really done. The appearance of Jesus, the Son of God, is a historical fact that changed the course of history. His words and instructions were recorded in the Gospels. In any question regarding the will or nature of God, the teachings of Jesus prevail over every other source. For He was the Son of God who came down from heaven. He specifically came to reveal God to Mankind and said, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." (*Jn 14:9*) He specifically said his disciples should be taught to "observe all that I have commanded you" and the Bible is the record of these commands. (*Mt 28:19-20*) This then is the standard by which all other ideas, prophecies, and experiences must be weighed.

You may find some people at times who claim to have a new revelation about God or that a later prophet has come, etc. Do not believe these things. The Bible says that God does not change, Jesus does not change, and the Gospel does not change (*Mal 3:6, Heb 13:8, Jude 3*). The apostle Paul said that if he, or even an angel from heaven, should preach a Gospel other than the one which they had already received, they should be eternally condemned. (*Gal 1:8-9*) This then, is what makes the Bible a reliable authority. Fads, ideas, and prophecies may come and go, but the Word of the Lord stands forever. (*Lk 21:33, 1 Pet 1:25*)