

It is a privilege to continue in this series, *Renewing the Mind and Scripture*. We've caught the vision here at CPC to become transformed people who are transforming the peninsula.

My wife's mom passed away a few weeks ago. Julie and I were tasked with the job of going through her mom's little apartment and all of her things. We sorted things and saved mementos to keep or pass on to other family members, and we accumulated bags and bags of things to donate. Then, we gave away to others what we thought they could use.

One thing I noticed as we were going through her things was that she loved inspirational phrases. She had them posted all throughout her apartment. You'd open a cabinet to take out some dishes, and on the inside of the cabinet would be a scripture verse. That was just how she lived. I had the privilege and honor to go through her books as well. I thought I would keep something to remind me of her. So I have her Bible that I'm using today, and it is pretty well-worn. I can tell you it's a real treasure for me. When I see a Bible like this, I'm reminded of what Charles Spurgeon said. "Bibles that are falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't." Certainly, it was that way with her. She relied on scripture, and as you go through it, you see her notes and the different things that she highlighted.

So today, we're going to take a deeper look at this amazing book we call the Bible. It's a collection of 66 books. It was written in three languages, written on three different continents by 40 authors over a span of 1500 years, using various literary styles. The overarching theme, Genesis through Revelation, is the glory of God displayed through the creation story. The darkness of the fall of mankind, the redemption story that leads up to the climax of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. The establishment of God's kingdom through Jesus and then the ongoing expansion of his kingdom as he expands his church until we wait for Christ's second coming when the new heaven and new earth are established.

This book explains all of this. It's a really popular book if you're a bookseller. Since the early 1800s, over five billion copies of the Bible have been in circulation, translated into almost 3,000 languages. And yet American society has a very conflicted view about the Bible. Although 9 out of 10

households in the United States own a Bible, a growing number of Americans view the Bible as just another book—a book of stories, a bunch of names that are hard to pronounce, and a book that is sprinkled with some sound advice.

However, as I was looking at these statistics, I noticed that the majority of Americans view the book not just as any other book but as an important book. According to a survey I heard this week, a lot of people are pro-Bible. Ownership is strong. Most people have multiple Bibles in their houses. And literally, billions of people have taken steps to download Bible apps on their various devices. But being pro-Bible is different from being pro-reading the Bible. Bible engagement is weak. Eighty percent of people who own a Bible in the United States do not read it regularly. That means that only 20 percent of the people who own a Bible read it at least four times a week, according to this survey. To them, it's not just an important book; it's the book.

When I say it's the book, I mean that the scriptures shape their worldview. It's a life manual. It's a book for the living, but it's also a book for the dying. And it can be summed up by Jesus himself when he said to Satan, "*It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God*" (Matt. 4:4).

CPC's vision is to become transformed people who are transforming the peninsula, and that describes a way of life. The way we become transformed people—the first thing we've been focusing on as Kevin has brilliantly led us through this—is to be present with God and then to participate in what he's doing around us. When we're present with God, we're taught about becoming more attentive to God through the habits of silence and solitude and Sabbath rest. We've taught about the renewing of the mind by focusing on the habits of fasting. And now we're in this series on scripture.

To put it another way, John Mark Comer, one of the clear thinkers on discipleship, tells us that to be present with God and participate in what he's doing around us, we need to organize our lives in such a way that we are intentionally opening ourselves up to be with Jesus, to become like Jesus and to do what Jesus did. In other words, to come under the authority of Jesus. So how can we really be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what Jesus did unless we

are renewing our minds with scripture? That's what we're doing today.

Our big idea this morning is that if we accept the authority of Christ in our lives, we must accept Jesus and the authority of scripture in our lives. What we believe about the Bible will determine our beliefs and behaviors. If we don't believe the Bible, we will make up our own beliefs and behaviors as we want to, as we choose to. Almost 3,000 years ago, the writer of the book of Judges summed it up this way. *"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit" (Judges 21:25).* But if we believe the Bible, we believe it in such a way that it's the book; we believe it frames our lives. And if we believe God's Word is the book, and it's the foundation of our faith. If we believe that we're under that authority, we believe that God's Word provides direction for all of our decisions in all of our behaviors and that God's word is living in us, and that's why transformation is possible.

I think a lot of us are somewhere between the Bible is an important book and the Bible is **the** book. I want to encourage anyone today who wants the Bible to be the important book. They want that book to be in their lives. I just love the words of Paul.

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Isn't that encouraging? "At work in us who believe. "

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:14-17

So today, we're going to dive deeper into what Paul says about this. He's sending a letter of encouragement to Timothy, a young pastor in Ephesus. Paul is encouraging Timothy to stand strong for Jesus. Paul encouraged Timothy to be aware and wise because there were religious fakes out there in Ephesus who were going to try to infiltrate the church. They were scammers and he's saying to Timothy to stay strong and follow Jesus. There were these inevitable hard times that were going to follow, and Timothy needed to have this understanding of what he had before him in scripture to stay strong in Jesus.

Speaking to Timothy he says, "but as for you, continue" Now that doesn't sound very strong in the English language, but it isn't a suggestion, it isn't an exhortation. Paul is giving Timothy a command. It's emphatic here. It's a command to continue. The word Paul uses here is the same word that Jesus used in John 15.

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:4-5

So Paul says to remain, Timothy, and continue in what? In what you have learned. From that word learned, we get the word disciple. So continue in your discipling in what you have become convinced of. Continue in what you have been assured of. Continue in those convictions that you have. A very important part of all this when we study the Bible, which we looked at in this Renewing the Mind series, is we have to have those convictions of what the Bible is and the authority that it has in our lives. That's what holds us up when things are difficult, what you are convinced and assured of.

Then he continues, "because you know or appreciate those from whom you learned it." That's kind of a surprise point. He's talking about the value here of all those who were involved in his life and disciplined him. Paul tells Timothy to continue in what you have learned and remember who you learned it from. Timothy learned from Paul. Paul taught him, disciplined him, and modeled a strong, faithful life to him. Paul was Timothy's hero, but long before Paul, we learned back in 2 Timothy 1:5, that he had two other heroes from infancy—his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice. They taught Timothy the scriptures.

As I looked in my mother-in-law's Bible at 2 Timothy 1:15, she had it marked all over. I think of the impact that she had on my wife growing up and then on our granddaughters until the day she died. That impact, from whom we learned so much.

From Whom We Have Learned The Scriptures

So why should we continue in the scriptures? Because of from whom we have learned the scriptures. I think many of us here have these faith stories, and we can talk about those spiritual heroes in our lives. He also says that "from infancy, you have known." The language is revealing something interesting. It's in perfect tense, which means that the effects of having learned early in life from grandma and mom continue into the present and on into the future.

And what are the effects of it? It's the holy scriptures. From the Greek word for scriptures, *graphe*, we get the word graph or lithium graph. It's important because Paul is telling us that the holy scriptures are literal words, literal writings. It's graphed on parchment and now paper with authority. It's not just in the mind; it's actually the words of God spoken with authority. Three thousand times in the Bible there's a reference to the authority of God about what is about to be said. "This is the word of the Lord," or "The word of the Lord came to me." God tells Moses, not that he'd give him a thought, an idea, when he went before Pharaoh. He said, "I'll give you the words to speak."

Scriptures Are Able To Make Us Wise

"And how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able" (v. 15a). That might be the most important thing I could say the whole time here. They are able to do what? That word able means it has the transformational power. "to make you wise for salvation in Christ Jesus" (v. 15b). So not only should we continue in the scriptures because we know who taught us and how we learned the scriptures, but we should continue in the scriptures because they are able to make us wise. They have the power to give us wisdom leading to salvation through faith, which is by Jesus Christ.

Paul is telling us today that the scriptures are the chief weapon that the church, that CPC, has been given to accomplish our vision and mission, which is to make and mature more followers of Christ. So as we look at our world and what appears to be growing evil and what appears to be growing confusion, we might be tempted to change our message. But he's saying we must stay the course, continuing to teach and believe the word of God without apology, no matter how rough things get.

So, one of the most important factors for us to carry out our mission is the reminder that God's word is sufficient and that we're dependent upon it. It's our strong foundation. It's our conviction. And when we don't understand God's plans, God's movement in certain areas, or maybe in your life, a lack of movement in certain areas, we have to remain seated on that foundation. We have to hold that conviction in our hearts that this is God's Word. Paul had confidence in scripture, so we can have confidence in it. We know the source, we know its power and that power brings us wisdom and salvation through faith in Jesus.

I love Paul's words in Romans 10:17. *"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ."* So, the Word of God is the only solution. That's what we stake it all on for our world. As we continue in that Word regularly, we grow in our conduct, purpose, faith, patience, and love. When we share

the scriptures, we need to share them with confidence with people who are struggling because hearts that are far from God can be moved by scripture into faith in God. Now, not everyone will respond to it; that's God's issue. But God gives us no better solution to reach people than through the Word of God.

I think we need to remember that studying the Bible won't get us to heaven; only Jesus will. And these scriptures point to Jesus. But as you study it, he makes us wise for salvation. The whole Bible is pointing to one person—Jesus Christ. Everything in the Old Testament points to Jesus in some way and Jesus' coming to earth, his first advent. In fact, there are 300 Old Testament prophecies that are specifically fulfilled in the New Testament that fill in the details about who Jesus was, what he came to do, and the events around his first coming.

Then we have the gospels, and they reveal in detail Jesus' life and ministry, his death, and his resurrection. Then we have Paul's letters and the letters of others that help us understand what Jesus' work accomplished, what his teaching said, and expanding on that. We have the essentials of our doctrines, the doctrine of sin and salvation and church and future, and our practices in the church and in Christian ethics; it's all there. Then we have the prophecy Revelation revealing to us the promise of Jesus' second coming to establish the new heaven and the new earth.

Scriptures Are God Breathed

In 2 Timothy 3:16, we have a famous verse. *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,"* I get pretty motivated to open my Bible when I'm reminded that what I'm opening is God-breathed. Literally, all scripture, he says here, is breathed out by God. It means every word, every letter, even the smallest jot or tittle. Jot. What is that? It's a small Hebrew letter that is for emphasis. And what is a tittle? It is a comma, a small punctuation mark. You might be asking, why does a comma matter? Let me illustrate this.

I'm going to tell you that this story is completely made up, and this would never have happened in my life, but let's just say I'm walking through the door to Costco. And you know how they put the best, newest, and biggest TVs right in the front. So, I'm seeing these beautiful televisions; I look at the price and text it to Julie. She's not with me, and she texts me back these words: "No price too high." What would you do? You go buy the TV, right? Now, suppose there was to be a comma after the word "no." So instead of "No price too high," it should have read "No, price too high." It's a totally different message because there was no comma. Every word, every letter, every punctuation mark

is God-breathed in scripture. It matters. We can trust every word.

God-breathed. How many words can we trust? There are over 700,000 words breathed out by God. Some translations here say inspired. I think the best translation is breathed out by God through men. The Pentateuch, the history, the poetry, the prophecy, the gospels, the letters, and Revelation, all breathed out by God through men. All the words describing the symbols in scripture, the visions, the ceremonies, the miracles all breathed out by God through men.

In Hebrew, the words spirit and breath are the same. A God breath, as God breathed life, breathed a soul into Adam's body that was made of dirt and gave him life. So he breathed his word into human writers. And what does he say? What is it useful for? Useful for teaching. Teaching provides content so we know what is right. Rebuking. Rebuking brings conviction, so we know what's not right. Sometimes, it'll be necessary for scripture to just smack us upside the head. Teaching and rebuking have to do with changing what we believe, training us into right thinking, and renewing the mind. As someone once said, "One portion of scripture can soothe you, and another part of scripture can slay you." Or I love this: "The Bible comforts the afflicted but afflicts the comfortable."

From what I have read, I wouldn't say that Mark Twain is a paradigm of Christian faith, but he had some wise things to say. He said, "Most people are bothered by those passages of scripture they do not understand. But the passages that bother me the most are those I do understand." He goes on to say, "We're corrected by scripture, so we know how to get it right. It means to change course and go a different path, the right path." And he says it is useful for training in righteousness. That's training in right living, training character so we can stay right.

So as teaching and rebuking change our thinking, correcting and training in righteousness changes our actions so we make right choices, so we live right. There's a lot of things out there that can inspire us. Technological breakthroughs, certainly for some of us, inspires us. Great paintings inspire. Taylor Swift inspires when she performs. Steph Curry inspires when he plays. We're inspired by those things.

Positive self-help books can have things in them that inspire, and the Bible is certainly full of things that inspire. But the Bible does more. It brings transformation set apart from everything else that inspires because it's God speaking. *"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and*

spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to understand and apply scriptures and wrestle deeply with its truths. A great prayer from Psalm 119:18 says, *"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."* In other words, God reveals truth, and then the Holy Spirit allows us to understand it and apply the truth as we read it, as we study it, as we meditate on it. There are three key terms, and really they're key convictions that I think we need to have to understand the authority of scripture in our lives. These are the things we hold on to when things aren't going well, when evil seems to be prevailing.

Verbally Inspired

As we need to remember God's character, we need to remember his word is verbally inspired. 1 Corinthians 2:13 says, *"This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words."* I'd like to use our CPC Statement of Faith to help us understand. One of our statements has to do with the Bible.

We believe that the Bible is the word of God, supernaturally inspired, inerrant in the original manuscripts so that it is the divinely authoritative standard for every age and every life. CPC Statement of Faith

I think that's been there since the beginning of CPC. So, a couple of new terms here—inerrant—that's a pretty modern term, less than 200 years old. It means without error. And that sounds good to me.

Then we add in our statement "in the original manuscripts." Do we actually have any original manuscripts that have survived over 2000 years? We do not. And why does that matter? Because it's important to know that at one time we did. We believe that Paul and Luke and John and all the other writers did write things down, and what they wrote down was without error. These were called the original manuscripts. Organic material, parchment, can last a long time if it's in the right temperature and in the right humidity, but none of it can last forever. So, in church history, there was this entire industry over thousands of years that copied manuscripts. I picture rabbis and scribes sitting at a table with a candle, little friars, little monks, copying, devoting their lives to copying these manuscripts, to preserve them for the next generation, to maintain accuracy for the next generation, copying and copying until the printing press in the 15th century.

I think we'd be naive to think that there were no small copying errors; I'm sure there were. There may have been

a jot or a tittle missing somewhere. But if you dig into the issue, you'll discover that 99 percent of our Bible that we have here in the best translations is amazingly consistent with what scholars trace back to the history of the copied manuscripts. And where there's a small discrepancy, I know in my Bible, I can look down and there's often a footnote that will explain that some manuscripts have said something slightly different. Let's get Peter's take. I love Peter's take on this verbal inspiration.

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:20-21.

So God directed the process, choosing to use human authors. But it wasn't just these guys sitting around in a circle prayer meeting saying, "You know what, we need to have some scripture. We better go off and come up with some and write it down." It wasn't them just writing down their thoughts. The inspiration didn't originate from the authors of these 66 books, but God used their human wills and personalities in the process.

They weren't just taking down dictation from God. They were moved by God. Moved is a sailing or maritime metaphor. The word is *pheromenoi*. It means to be carried along by the wind. So Peter and Paul and others raised their sails, and there was freedom in the boat, but the destination that they went to was exactly where God wanted to take them as the Holy Spirit filled their sails.

Divine Revelation

The second key term is divine revelation. This is so important to us. God revealed himself from scripture, and he also revealed himself in what's called general revelation through creation. Paul says we have no excuse not to believe in God when we look out and see sunsets, flowers, animals, and stars. But then he talks about a divine or special revelation through his Son.

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. Hebrews 1:1-2

So God, revealing himself through special revelation through the scriptures, revealed Jesus, the Son of God. Today, we still believe, 2000 years after his death and resurrection, that God still speaks to the human race through the divine revelation of Jesus that is revealed through the scriptures through illumination or understanding that we

receive by the Holy Spirit when we open his living Word and read it.

Authoritative

Authoritative means the Bible is binding to us. As we started out stating that we are all under the authority of Jesus, we are automatically then under the authority of scripture because Jesus and his Word can't be disconnected from one another. God has spoken and chosen to reveal himself through his Word. *"Your word, Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens" (Psalm 119:89).*

John Huss, a Protestant Reformer, was burned at the stake for his beliefs. When he was attacked for his opposition to the traditions of the church, he answered his opponents by showing that he was under that authority of scripture. "Show me from scripture that I am wrong. And if I am, I will repent, and I will recant." When the great reformers were challenged by the religious traditions, they would ask, "Where is it written?" You have this belief, but where is it written? The reformer's authority was the scripture. That was the battle cry against the persecution. They had this unwavering commitment and understanding that they were under the authority of Christ and of scripture.

When I was in college, I worked for a reinforcing steel company. We put those little steel bars in before they pour concrete to make them strong. I worked for a contractor, and we would receive the plans. They were engineering and architectural plans, and we would interpret the plans and would fabricate the steel, and then go install it. Sometimes, we'd run into something that didn't make sense to us when we were looking at the plans. We didn't have options because we didn't have authority. We couldn't just change what the engineer had drawn on the plans because we, as contractors, couldn't go there and change it. We didn't have the authority. We might have called the engineer for clarification, but we did not have the authority to change it on our own.

We, the church, are contractors. We just do what the plan says. We have no authority to change the plan or alter it because we're not the designer. So he exhorts us to continue in the Word because our heroes modeled that so well; it makes us wise, leads us to Christ, and because our scripture is God-breathed.

Scriptures Thoroughly Equip

Finally we should continue in the the scriptures because the scriptures thoroughly equip. *"so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17).* Paul's closing his thought by telling us that the Bible gives us everything we need to live out a good working life in this world. And even more, he says it fully equips us for

every good work. This idea that the Bible gives us authority should resonate that this is where we go to be right with God and to do his work. In other words, we could get rid of our cell phones, we could get rid of technology, we could get rid of every creature comfort, and every convenience, and if we only had our Bible, you and I would have everything we need in this book to know God and do every good work for him. That's how powerful it is.

Before I moved here, I had a hobby, which doesn't work when you live in a condominium. I gardened. We had a really nice garden because we had a big yard. We grew all kinds of vegetables. We would read the seed catalogs. I'd read about compost. I'd talk to people about composting. I had a friend who had chickens, and he'd bring over manure. It was great! We'd till the soil, figure out how we'd place the plants, where we'd put them, what plants needed to be together for pollination, and all those things. Because it was a cold climate, we'd start growing some of the plants indoors. We had a light, and we'd grow some of them indoors and then transplant them after the freeze. We'd talk to other gardeners about our experiences.

What we realized was it was really this extension of this lifestyle for companionship and affirmation. We were a community, and my understanding deepened as I practiced and lived in this. Once I moved back to California, and we lived in a condo, I never looked at a gardening book again. I couldn't do it. My deck off my condo is very small, so I wasn't growing things. You put away those things when you're not practicing it. I think the parallel to scripture is striking. If I'm not living in this active response relationship with God, reading about his creation and salvation and holiness won't hold my interest for very long. It's about a relationship.

The most important question is not what every single verse truly means if I don't understand it. The important thing is what my response is. What can I obey as I'm looking at God's Word? Simple obedience will open up our lives to a text more quickly than anything. It's going into it with a heart to obey God's word, no matter what wonderful tools we might have around us—Bible studies, dictionaries, and concordances.

I'm sure not all of us are engaged in scripture the way we would like to. We might think that it's an important book, but it really isn't the book in our life. But we have countless examples around us of minds being renewed because they

have taken Jesus' word seriously and taken scripture itself seriously. There are great stories of transformation in our midst.

I encourage you to try it yourself. Invest in that lifestyle of scripture. Ask questions. Does the Bible work? Is it real in the sense that it speaks to our needs and connects to us? I promise it does. It is real in a way that it helps us order our priorities in life. It is real in a way that it addresses life's challenges. Renewing the mind means moving into a habit, into a lifestyle, and investing in scripture. And as we do that, it becomes more and more engaging, more and more interesting, and more and more the passion of our lives.

"Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him" (Psalm 34:8).

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No.1483-3FC