

Following Jesus Requires His Word

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[0 : 00] Now, in case you weren't here a couple of weeks ago, we began a new series. I said that this study will be a refresher for some and quite foundational for others, but I believe everyone can benefit from it.

Sometimes it can be very helpful to get back to the basics, and that's basically what we're doing. We're considering what it really means to follow Jesus in a lot of different areas of life.

When Jesus approached his first disciples, he said, follow me. Now, they didn't immediately know everything that would entail, but you and I, we are blessed with a fuller revelation.

As we study through the New Testament, we can learn what it means to follow Jesus. We can learn how to follow Jesus. Now, last time I tried to emphasize that following Jesus, first of all, requires a life of faith, a life of trusting in the Lord, and that's precisely what the Lord calls us to do to put our trust in him.

According to Hebrews 11, 1, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. As I said before, God tells us, before he shows us.

[1 : 23] He teaches us how to follow him, and though we may not always understand how his plan is for the best, we trust, we trust, and we follow him nonetheless. By faith, we understand.

By faith, we understand. So as we trust and we follow, we grow into a better understanding. Now, last time I cited a verse in 2 Timothy 3, and I'd like to go there again this morning.

So if you will, turn in your Bible to 2 Timothy 3. 2 Timothy 3. Now, the thrust of this portion of Paul's letter to Timothy is Paul attempting to encourage Timothy to stand fast on the truth and to never yield from preaching the truth.

At the start of the chapter, he warns that difficult times are coming. He says, For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.

Avoid such people. Sadly, Paul is not talking about only people outside of the church when he says this. Verse 6. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at the knowledge of the truth.

[3 : 17] Just as Janus and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also opposed the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all as it was that of those two men.

So Paul is warning Timothy about false teachers in the church. They creep into households, that is, the houses in which the church met. Then, he says, verse 10, You, however, you, Timothy, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, Iconium, and Elystra, which persecutions I endured.

Yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

This is what the church faces until the second coming of Christ. We face persecution from outside of the church, and we face false teachers and deceivers inside of the church.

In other words, we face threats on all sides. They're everywhere. So Paul encourages Timothy to, in this case, study his example, his teaching, his manner of life.

[4 : 55] Now, he isn't saying, Timothy, look at me because I'm perfect. No, it's more like what he said to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11 to 1, Be imitators of me as I am of Christ.

So, he says, follow me, but he qualifies that. You should follow me as long as I'm faithfully following Christ.

Then comes what should be a familiar passage to most of us. Verse 14. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how, from childhood, you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

This is really the text I want us to focus on, but let me read just a bit further. Paul continues. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word.

[6 : 22] Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching.

But having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded.

Endure suffering. Do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill your ministry. So we can see that Paul is primarily encouraging this young minister, Timothy, to be a faithful teacher of the word.

And we'll talk about this more in a moment, but the word of God inevitably confronts sinners with things they don't like. It confronts us with things we don't necessarily want to hear because it exposes our sin.

It exposes our weaknesses. So the temptation of any pastor is to scratch itching ears, to tell people what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear.

[7 : 27] Now, I don't have to tell you, this is a very relevant problem today. Maybe you've been in situations like I have where you're talking with a fellow believer and they happen to mention a book they're reading or a pastor they're listening to and the name of that author or that pastor sounds all kinds of alarm bells in your mind.

You immediately start thinking about the most delicate way to tell your friend that they're listening to somebody they really shouldn't listen to. It's all around us.

Paul was right. As Christians, we have to be very careful. We need to take everything we hear, everything we read, back to Scripture to confirm whether it's true.

And pastors have a great responsibility and really an immense pressure to always preach the truth according to Scripture. And that's our subject today.

Last time I made the point that faith is in part about learning. It's a vital part of faith. And learning primarily comes through the Word of God.

- [8 : 42] That is the Bible. The Bible is a tremendous gift to us. Just think for a moment where we would be without it.
- What would we know if we didn't have the Bible? If God did not provide us with His written revelation of Himself and of His will, what could we know?
- According to Romans 1, we would know that God exists. And we would know that He is very powerful.
- Paul says, For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. How so? For His invisible attributes, namely His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made.
- So creation itself shows us that there is a God and that He's very powerful. What else? According to Romans 2, we also have a conscience that tells us there is an objective moral standard.
- [9 : 59] Now, if you ask an atheist, and assuming that atheist is willing to be consistent with his own worldview that there is no God, he will tell you that morality cannot be objective.
- How could it? If there's no God to give us an objective standard, then morality is fluid. It's entirely subjective.
- Communities of people, if not individuals, create their own standards. So in short, there is no such thing as an ultimate right or wrong in the atheist worldview.
- But here's what Paul says in Romans 2, verses 14 and 15. For when Gentiles who do not have the law by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.
- They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness. And their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.
- [11 : 12] So what is Paul saying? He's saying that God, our almighty creator, has given us an objective moral standard. We call it his law.
- And even people who do not have that law in some tangible form, they still show that they have a sense of it. They have a conscience. They may be fuzzy about the details.
- They may ignore. They may disregard much of it. But they have a conscience that tells them there is such a thing as right and wrong.
- So even without the Bible, there are some things we can know. We know there is a God. We can know that we've offended him. I would argue that we see this every time we see a sinner converted.
- When we attempt to make disciples in evangelism, I suppose there's a place to argue for the existence of God and for the sinfulness of man, but you'll find that most people who are converted don't need convinced.
- [12 : 14] You may need to confront them with this, but according to Paul, they already know it. They know there's a God and they know there's something terribly wrong.
- That's why the most important part of evangelism is declaring the good news of Jesus Christ, the solution to the problem. Even if they don't admit it, most people, they already know there's a God above.
- They know there's something terribly wrong. So we simply hold out the answer. Jesus Christ. And we need the Bible for that, don't we?
- That's why most of our historic church confessions, they always begin with a section explicitly about the Bible. Without the Bible, our knowledge is severely limited.
- If we're going to learn about God or ourselves or salvation or Christ or what it means to follow Christ, we need God to speak to us through Scripture.

[13 : 22] Listen to what the Baptist Confession of Faith says in the opening paragraph. The Holy Scriptures are the only sufficient, certain, and infallible standard of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.

The light of nature and the works of creation and providence so clearly demonstrate the goodness, wisdom, and power of God that people are left without excuse. However, these demonstrations are not sufficient to give the knowledge of God and His will that is necessary for salvation.

Therefore, the Lord was pleased at different times and in various ways to reveal Himself and to declare His will to His church, to preserve and propagate the truth better, and to establish and comfort the church with greater certainty against the corruption of the flesh and the malice of Satan and the world, the Lord put this revelation completely in writing.

Therefore, the Holy Scriptures are absolutely necessary because God's former ways of revealing His will to His people have now ceased. In other words, there are certain things we can know without the Bible, but it's not enough.

So God has revealed what we need to know in various ways at different times until everything was finally written and canonized in the Bible and praise God for it.

[14 : 48] I mean, He has given us a treasure of immeasurable value in possibly the most convenient form possible. one book, black and white, here it is, everything we need to know from beginning to end, and we can grab a copy and we can read it anytime we want.

And we live in a time when we are blessed with what we call an embarrassment of riches regarding the Bible. So we need to read it, don't we?

And we must if we are to follow Jesus. And I say that for two reasons. First of all, we won't know how to follow Jesus apart from what Scripture reveals to us.

Last time I said following Jesus requires faith. Romans 10, 17, faith comes from hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ. Whether we hear it preached or we read it on the page, we can't follow Christ until we know something about Him, until we know something about His will for us.

So we read it in His Word and it teaches us how to follow Jesus. Second, if we're following Jesus, and this is something we learn from Scripture, we will read and study the Bible because Christ read and studied the Bible.

[16 : 19] We can't follow Christ faithfully if our Bibles are sitting on the shelf collecting dust. For Jesus, it is written was always the final word of a matter.

Always. There can be no arguments if it is written in Scripture. In John 10, 35, Jesus said, Scripture cannot be broken.

Cannot be broken. It cannot be upended. It cannot be destroyed. It is the final word on everything. Sinners may ignore what it says. We may deny what it says, but according to Jesus, it is the end-all, be-all.

It is the highest authority. And if you remember the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10, it is absolutely necessary that we learn from Him.

And we, of course, learn from Him again through His word. Now, to that point, Jesus Himself shows us that all Scripture ultimately teaches us about Him.

[17 : 24] In Luke 24, the resurrected Christ, He's walking with two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus. They don't know it's Him. And Luke says, beginning with Moses and the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

So according to Christ, all of Scripture is about Christ. If we want to follow Jesus, we need the Bible. In his book, Following Jesus, Andrew Randall asks four questions.

Number one, what is the Bible? Number two, why do we need it? Number three, how does it work?

And number four, what does it do? And I'll attempt to answer these questions one at a time. So first, what is the Bible?

Well, Paul gives us a pretty good definition here in 2 Timothy 3. He says, all Scripture is breathed out by God. Many translations say all Scripture is inspired by God.

[18 : 36] But I'm partial to the more literal translation. Yes, Scripture is inspired. But we don't want to get the impression that God is merely nudging the biblical authors in the right direction. He's not merely stirring them up to write something. You know, authors and writers often talk about being inspired to write. They need to be inspired in order to be creative and do their work.

But that's a much different thing than what we have here in Scripture. God breathed out Scripture. He exhaled the words of Scripture. So put another way, the words of Scripture, though they were pinned by human beings, they are in fact the words of God Himself.

And that is precisely what makes them authoritative. The Bible is not a collection of the best that human wisdom has to offer. This is God speaking to us.

Now having said that, we don't want to remove the human authors altogether either. When God inspired them, He didn't take control of them like puppets on a string, you know?

[19 : 43] And if that's the way we think about the inspiration of Scripture, it kind of takes away from the marvel of it all. In Scripture, we have seemingly impossible consistency from Genesis all the way to Revelation.

And this consistency, surprisingly, comes to us through 40-plus authors over thousands of years living in a lot of different places. They have different styles.

They're writing in different eras from very different circumstances. There are multiple cultures represented in the Bible. And sometimes those differences are very important to understanding what is written in those books.

When God inspired Scripture, He didn't strip the authors of their personalities or their experiences. He used them. In fact, we sometimes see the authors, they're operating as though they're not inspired at all.

And what do I mean by that? Well, take Luke, for instance. At the beginning of his Gospel, he says, inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, speaking of Jesus and his works, his ministry, just as those who were from the beginning eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed or studied or examined all things closely for some time past to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

[21 : 21] So here we have Luke, an author of one of the Gospels, explicitly stating that, you know, I went out and I researched and I studied the life and ministry of Christ.

I did the interviews. I talked to the witnesses. I read the material. In other words, he did his homework. He prepared himself. He didn't sit down at the desk one day empty-handed and say, Lord, I'm ready.

Inspire me. Take control of my hand. Take control of my body and write what you will. No, it would seem as far as Luke was concerned, he's preparing and writing this Gospel all on his own.

Yet we know that all Scripture is breathed out by God. according to 1 Peter 1.21 or 2 Peter 1.21 no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

They were carried along in this work. God breathed his words into them or better yet, it might be more appropriate to say God breathed his words through them.

[22 : 40] He guided them in such a way that though they were writing their own words, putting in their own effort, the final product was God's Word.

And that really is something to marvel at. It seems that the prophets of the Old Testament marveled at it. Peter says something in 1 Peter 1 that I've always found fascinating.

He says, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

So here you have the prophets in the Old Testament. The Spirit of Christ is giving them these prophecies about Christ and they speak them and they write them and then what do they do?

They go back and they study their own writings because they don't fully understand what's been written. They wrote them. And I think that demonstrates what the inspiration process was like for many authors of Scripture.

[23 : 59] Though they set out to write something on their own, they can look back and recognize a divine work in it. These are not my words.

In short, the Bible is uniquely significant. It's not like any other book. Paul says it's sufficient for the man of God.

It's authoritative because it's the very words of God. It is God revealing himself from heaven to earth. Now I've noticed a subtle yet very disturbing trend among some Christians.

I've heard pastors try to discourage people from thinking of the Bible as the foundation of our faith. They like to say the Bible is not our foundation.

Jesus Christ is our foundation. And I'll just simply say that's an absurd statement. I get the point they're trying to make. But we cannot separate Christ from the word of Christ.

[25 : 07] That's the problem. Think about what Jesus says at the end of his sermon on the mount. He says, He says, And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.

Is that not Jesus saying that his words are foundational? Later, he tells his disciples that you can't possibly love me without keeping my word, keeping my commandments, obeying me.

You can't separate love for Christ from obedience to Christ. You see, the Bible is our foundation because Christ is our foundation.

The Bible is our means to knowing about Christ and learning his will for us. So it's absurd, not to mention very dangerous, to try and separate Christ from his word and vice versa.

[26 : 35] So what is the Bible? It's the word of God, and we absolutely need it. We can't follow Christ without it. Here's what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 2.13.

Notice that last part.

He says, leads to the next question.

Why do we need the Bible? Now, I won't spend a lot of time on this one since I've essentially answered it already. Again, Paul says, We need the Bible because it makes us complete.

Quite literally, Paul says it makes us completely complete. It completely completes us for every good work. Specifically, we're talking about what it means to follow Christ.

[28 : 26] How do we follow Christ? Well, it is the Bible that equips us for this task. In every area of life, it's the Bible that either explicitly tells us what to do, or provides us with the information needed to apply wisdom to any given situation.

Now, this may seem like a very obvious point to most of us, but it's not an obvious point to everyone. You see, Paul is implying that we need the Bible because we are not naturally equipped to follow Jesus.

In other words, we aren't naturally inclined to follow, and we don't readily know how to follow, so we need Scripture to equip us. But here's the thing.

There are lots of people who, number one, believe we are mostly good. Yes, we're sinners, but we're mostly good. So they would say that following righteousness, following Jesus, is more natural for us than what the Bible says it is.

And number two, there are lots of people who believe, like ignorance in the pilgrim's progress, they can simply follow the hearts. Jesus will lead them apart from Scripture.

[29 : 54] I've had a lot of conversations along the way with people who can talk endlessly about Christ. But they say a lot of things that contradict what the Bible says about Christ.

And when I pay attention to what they're saying, I notice how often they will use expressions like, you know, I feel, fill in the blank. They're not really claiming to speak the revealed truth from Scripture.

They're essentially asserting that their feelings or their opinions are of higher authority than the Word of Christ. So I think it's worth stating the obvious.

We need Scripture to equip us. We aren't naturally inclined to follow Jesus. We don't know how to follow Jesus, which is why Paul tells the Romans, be transformed, be changed by the renewal of your mind.

Left to ourselves, we go the way of the world. But the Bible, that living and active Word of God, it transforms us and it equips us.

[31 : 04] So, and this is our third question to answer, how does it work? How does the Bible transform us? How does the Bible equip us?

Well, first of all, let me tell you how it doesn't work. It doesn't work by giving us a formula to follow or a set of rules to keep.

Yes, the Bible contains lots of rules. It has lots of commandments. But if we see the Bible as a mere rule book, we will quickly become hopeless and frustrated.

Last time, two weeks ago, I read a passage from Matthew 11 where Jesus is speaking to the Jewish people who have known nothing but rules, it seems.

They've lived under the teachings of the Pharisees. And if you've ever read the Talmud, for instance, very interesting study, you know how heavy the burden was for them.

[32 : 07] I mean, rules about everything. Very detailed rules about everything. You can't carry anything on the Sabbath that weighed anything more than a dried fig.

Well, how much does a dried fig weigh? You know, can I pick up my toothbrush on the Sabbath? Can't walk more than 3,000 feet from your home, unless maybe you have a fence post that is 3,000 feet from your home.

And then you can walk another 3,000 feet. Well, I... And it goes on and on. I mean, so they weren't just trying to keep God's commandments when Jesus came along.

They were trying to keep the countless rules that Jewish leaders imposed above and beyond God's commandments. And here's what Jesus says to them. And you can just almost feel the refreshment that would come over these people listening to this, assuming they believe Him.

when He says, Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

- [33 : 22] So Jesus does want to teach us something. Learn from Me, He says. He does have commandments to obey. But they're light by comparison.

Why? Well, notice what He's really saying to them. He's not saying, Look at My rules compared to the Pharisees' rules. My book has one chapter.

Their book has, you know, 30-plus chapters. No, He's saying, Look at Me. Not My rules. Look at Me.

He says, Come to Me, and I will give you rest. First and foremost, the Bible is not about us. It's not about what we're supposed to be doing.

It's about Christ. First and foremost, it's about Christ. It's about what He has already done for us. It's about what He is still doing for us. It's about what He promises to do for us.

- [34 : 24] It's about Him. The Bible ultimately points us to Christ. And as it expands our vision of Him, I pray, captivating our hearts, we become increasingly equipped to follow Him.

We come to see Him more clearly. We come to love Him more deeply. And along the way, we come to resemble Him more closely. That's how the Bible works.

That's how Jesus Himself read the Bible. Again, how did He lead those disciples on the road to Emmaus through the Old Testament? Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

He went back to the Old Testament, which we don't commonly think of as being about Jesus, and He said, look, all of it's about me.

All of it's about me. If we're not reading the Bible with a priority to learn more about Christ, we're simply not reading the Bible correctly.

- [35 : 40] We often want to go to the Bible to find out, what can I get out of this? What do I need to do? What should I change? And so on and so forth. But first and foremost, we should be asking ourselves, what can I learn about Christ?

Now, assuming we are reading the Bible correctly, here's our fourth and final question. What does it do?

I'll give you five things. Well, Paul will give you five things. First, the Bible is able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

That's 2 Timothy 3.15. The Bible, as well as the preaching of the Bible, is God's ordinary means for producing, saving faith.

Through it, we learn about Christ and we come to believe in Him. But Scripture does more than bring us to faith. It also grows our faith. So, second, the Bible teaches.

- [36 : 52] Verse 16. All Scripture Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. Scripture teaches, first of all.

Without it, who knows what kind of false ideas we'd have about God or about salvation or ourselves or the world around us. It's the Bible that clarifies what is true and what is right.

Third, Scripture reproves. That is, it rebukes. It reprimands. It confronts us with our sin.

It exposes our sin. But mercifully, it also leads us to restoration. Fourth, Scripture corrects.

I really like J.B. Phillips' paraphrase of this verse. I don't know whether you've ever read J.B. Phillips' paraphrase of the New Testament, but it can be helpful.

- [37 : 53] It's not Scripture. It's a paraphrase, but it can be helpful. He says, all Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the faith and correcting error, for resetting the direction of a man's life and training him in good living.

I like that word reset because I think that's the idea being conveyed here. Think of, think of breaking a bone and you go to the doctor so he can reset it. He puts that bone back in place to aid in the healing process.

That's what Paul's talking about when he says correct. It corrects. Fifth, Scripture trains. It shows us how to live the right way.

God willing, it puts us on the right footing and in the right direction so maybe we don't need resetting later on. In short, the Bible serves to bring us into greater and greater conformity to the image of Christ.

We're not called into a new life in Christ merely to remain the same. What was the quote I heard from a pastor last week? He said, come as you are but don't expect to remain the same.

[39 : 16] Come as you are but don't expect to remain the same. We're called to repent. We're called to change. We're called away from pursuing our own lusts and desires to follow Christ, to follow His desires.

We learn from Him through His Word and we strive to become like Him. In the pursuit of holiness, Jerry Bridges writes, discipline toward holiness, that is, conformity to Christ, begins then with the Scriptures, with a disciplined plan for regular intake of the Scriptures and a disciplined plan for applying them to our daily lives.

And I like the word discipline in this context because we need discipline. We live in an age of constant distractions and entertainment, so frequent reading and studying doesn't always come easy for us.

we need to discipline ourselves. In the forward to one of R.C. Sproul's books, J.I. Packer wrote, if I were the devil, one of my first aims would be to stop folk from digging into the Bible.

Knowing that it is the Word of God, teaching men to know and love and serve the God of the Word, I should do all I could to surround it with the spiritual equivalent of pits, thorn hedges, and man traps to frighten people off.

[40 : 49] At all costs, I should want to keep them from using their minds in a disciplined way to get the measure of its message. Absolutely.

And he's actually been quite effective in modern times. In other words, the most effective thing the devil could ever do is keep us out of the Bible.

Why? If you starve people of the Bible, you starve them of the spiritual nourishment they need to grow and, of course, be equipped to follow Jesus faithfully.

So, before we can move into any area of life and discuss what it means to follow Jesus in those areas, we must understand that first, it requires faith, and second, we absolutely need the Bible.

And I don't just mean own a copy of the Bible. I mean we must read the Bible. We must learn more about Christ in that Bible. And then, God willing, we are equipped to follow Jesus.

[42 : 03] Let's pray. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you again for this time together in your word and I pray that it will be edifying to everyone here.

I pray that as we continue to read and to study your word that we will see Christ more fully. And I pray that we will come to love him more deeply than ever before.

And that our desire to be close to him has that transformative effect in our lives where we become increasingly conformed to his image. We become more like him.

I pray, God, that you would give us the grace to study, to learn, and to grow in this way. I pray that you would give us the grace to follow him faithfully. We understand that it is all by your grace and that we are going to need the help of your spirit to understand and to grow in these ways.

And Lord, I know that you are prepared to help us to that end. It is all for your glory, not our own, and I pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[43 : 08] We're dismissed.