

“that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.”

Luke 1:4



The Word of God – New Testament

Theme: The Word of God sets you free!

Review

The words of the Bible were God-breathed to the authors who were moved and guided by God to write precisely what He wanted. God then assured that the Word He gave was not lost but accurately transmitted down through the ages to us. Lesson three considered the Old Testament and taught that it is the perfect Word of God. The Word of God is old but timeless; thus, it has specific application to us. That Word teaches us His truth so we can be saved and know His will for our lives. The Bible teaches us about the future so we know what will certainly happen and what His plans are for the believer today. We should have a desire to devour the Word and then have a burning passion to live the truth it proclaims.

Introduction

This lesson will discuss how we got the New Testament (NT). Through the ages God has assured that humans did get a reliable copy of the New Testament text, but the process has been long and hard. Many people have lost their lives defending the NT text and the right of common people to read the Bible. This lesson will reveal how God assured us that we do have His Word today. A major issue will be in which translation(s) of the Bible we find His Words.

Bible Truth

Inspiration of the Original Writings

It is generally agreed the NT writers did not get together and decide to write more Scripture. God had this in His mind from the very beginning and breathed the words to His human authors, 2 Tim. 3:16. That means that God gave the writers the actual words to put down in writing even though He allowed their personality and style to also exist. Luke says the

Gospels and Acts were written so **"that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed"** (Luke 1:4). He knew the believers had to know for certain that the things they were taught were truly the Words of God.

The NT writers knew they were writing under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As for the Apostle Paul,

there can be no doubt he was writing by inspiration of the Spirit which was a confirmation of what had been revealed to him by the risen Christ. **"For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ"** (Gal. 1:12).

Canonization of the Sacred Writings

Paul told the churches to exchange his Epistles with other churches (Col. 4:16). John also instructs the believers to share his writings with the other churches (Rev. 1:11). It was in this manner that the NT writings became universally known (the Roman world). Accordingly, Peter indicates that Paul's writings were widely known and inspired (2 Pt. 3:15-16). By the fourth century there was agreement that the canon of Scripture (listing of books considered inspired by God) for the NT contained the 27 books we have today in our Bibles.

There are many books that were written under the name of an apostle or well-known leader that pretended to be genuine. Those false books did not pass the tests of "canonicity" discussed in Lesson three. The false books were 'weeded out' by the early churches and are not in the Protestant Bible. This was part of God's process of assuring the Bible had only the right books.

Order of the Books in the NT

The books in the NT follow this logical order developed in the early centuries:

1. Life of Jesus (Gospels)
2. Expansion from Jewish believers (Acts)
3. Early Christianity (Romans-Jude)
4. End times (Revelation)

Once the logical order was set, then the books of a common type were grouped together. Clearly Matthew through John record the life of Jesus Christ and are one group. Paul's books were put into the

Early Christianity writings and then divided into two groups: 1) those related to churches in a community (Romans--2 Thessalonians) and 2) those written to individuals (1 Timothy--Philemon). The books in each group were arranged according to their length with the longest first. Thus, Matthew came before Mark because it was longer. For Paul's Church Epistles, Romans was the longest, 1 Corinthians the next longest, and so forth.

The logical order of books does not explain why the Jewish-Christian Epistles (Hebrews through Jude) are after the Pauline books (Romans through Philemon). To this day there is controversy over where the books of Hebrews through Jude are placed. Many want them right after the Gospels which is where they fit logically. However, we believe they are in the correct position in the Bible; most likely God assured that position even if man cannot explain why.

Please be aware that our present Age of Grace interrupted the former age. Our Age started with the Apostle Paul and ends at the Rapture (when believers are taken from this earth to Heaven with Christ). When the Rapture occurs, our Age will end and God's plan for the rest of the world will go right back to where it was when our Age interrupted it. Thus, after Paul's writings (specifically for our Age), the next written Word seems especially designed for those people living after the Rapture (the time of the Tribulation and great terror upon the Earth). The books of Hebrews through Revelation will help those people recognize that Christ is the Savior and why world events of that time are so crazy. We too profit greatly by those books.

Consider: What does it say of God's care for His own when He assures those in the future have specific books written to help them through a very difficult time in life?

Assuring Common People Had the Word

A major issue throughout history was whether common people should be allowed to read the Bible in their own language. William Tyndale (1494-1536 AD) was the first person to print the New Testament in English, and he was guided by the belief that every plowboy (young, peasant farmer) in England should be able to read the Bible in English. This means he thought every person, regardless of education, gender, race, or status had the basic, God-given right to read the Bible in her/his own language. For centuries the idea that common people could understand the Bible was ridiculed, but such ridicule failed to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct every person to understand spiritual things.

In the centuries following Christ, millions of people lost their lives defending the truth of God's Word and for the right of common people to read the Bible. Many groups of believers, from shortly after Christ until the 1500's, secretly produced Bibles in their own language and suffered greatly for it. The reformers (those who broke away from the Roman Catholic Church in the 1500's AD and started Protestantism) believed common people had the right to read or hear the Bible in their own language. From shortly after the time of Christ until the reformers the religious leaders of the day thought only the Priests should read the Word, and they read it in Latin even though most people did not understand Latin. Many of the reformers were hunted down, killed, and burned at the stake for their beliefs (including William Tyndale).

A Biblical example of everyone, not just the important men, getting to hear the Word in their own language occurred during the reign of King Josiah (7th century BC). In his time the high priest found the book of the law (it had been lost for years) and when Josiah was shown the "book" and heard the words his sorrow over Israel's unbelief was so great that he rent his

cloths (tore them in anguish). Then **“The king went up to the house of the LORD ... and all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the LORD”** (2 Kings 23:2).

Incidentally, the invention of the movable type printing press in 1455 AD in Germany was perhaps the single most important event to influence the spread of the Bible because now it could be mass produced. Mass production allowed enough copies to be made so that common people could afford their own Bible; this was a huge event in history. It was also a major factor in the spread of the Gospel throughout the entire world.

Discuss the importance of every person (regardless of status, race, gender, or position) being able to read the Word of God in his/her own language.

Establishing the "Original"

In order to get the Bible written in the common languages it is first necessary to determine what the original writings were. The New Testament (NT) was originally written in Greek, so the most accurate translations into other languages should be made from the Greek. There is one problem—the original Greek writings do not exist. Since they do not exist, a copy of the original writings has to be “pieced together” from existing manuscripts (very old, hand-written copies in the original language). Even these old manuscripts are copies of the originals or other copies. The pieced-together document is called a “text.” There are over 5600 manuscripts in existence; some have only a few verses and some are nearly the complete NT. The vast majority of these manuscripts, about 90 percent, agree with one another.

Since no two hand-written copies are exactly alike, there are some who believe that the best way to determine the true Greek text is through examination

of the majority of the manuscripts while others put more emphasis on the oldest (but minority) manuscripts. At *Grace 4 You* we believe the majority of manuscripts produces the most reliable Greek text. However, the minority of manuscripts agree with the majority 95% of the time. Most of the differences are minor, and in the final analysis only some 50 significant differences exist. The good news is none of these differences will result in a change in our faith or statements of belief.

Illumination to Understand

We must always keep in mind that spiritual truth is taught to us by the Holy Spirit. **"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"** (1 Cor. 2:14). The natural mind does not receive, indeed cannot know, the things of God. So God has given the believer His Spirit so that we might know the things of the Lord. **"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has**

come, He will guide you into all truth ... and He will tell you things to come" (John 16:13). This work of the Spirit making known to us the things of God, including understanding Scripture, is called illumination (it creates spiritual light in our minds).

The Apostle Paul recognized the need for believers to be illuminated. He prayed that God would allow **"...the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling..."** (Eph. 1:18). Thus, using the Word the Spirit illuminates us so we can correctly understand what it is teaching. It is this ministry of the Holy Spirit that is often overlooked on the topic of translations; but He guides us to understand the truth of God even from poorer translations.

Discussion: God has given us the Holy Spirit to guide us into spiritual truth and to grasp the depth of God's wisdom. Does He speak in a voice we will hear or work quietly in our spirit?

Life Applications

A Reliable Translation

Grace 4 You lessons use the New King James Version (NKJV) of the Bible. The original KJV was published in 1611 AD. The NKJV uses more modern English than the KJV but some still find it hard to understand. It is used in these lessons because it is: accurate, well accepted, based upon the majority Greek text, and reliable.

All competent translations have strengths and weaknesses, but they are all the Word of God. Here is what the original KJV translators said, "We do not deny, nay, we affirm and avow, that the very meanest (lowest in quality) translation of the Bible in *English* ... containeth the word of God, nay, is the word of God" (parentheses added). So even the original KJV

translators and scholars since have affirmed that even low quality translations are indeed the Word of God.

Discussion: Compare these verses (Eph. 2:8-9 and John 3:16) from various translations. What do you think? Is His Word taught faithfully in each?

Competent translations into your language are the Word of God (paraphrases are not translations but have value). Reliable translations may include, but are not be limited to: KJV, NKJV, New International Version (NIV), New English Translation (NET), New American Standard Bible (NASB), English Standard Version (ESV), etc.

What the Word Does

Creates life: faith in Christ results in a new life (regeneration, born again, made new). **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"** (2 Cor. 5:17). This spiritual rebirth assures you of a new spiritual nature and eternal salvation. Also, your entire life will be changed as you continue to follow Him.

Kindles fire: when the Word speaks to your heart, it is like having the eyes of your understanding opened, you can finally see the truth. The disciples experienced this when they said, **"And they said to one another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us' "** (Luke 24:32)? As the Scriptures

are opened to you, this same burning within can take place. Your heart will burn with a desire to know more about Jesus Christ and how to follow Him.

Produces freedom: Jesus said to those who believed in Him **"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"** (John 8:32). The unbeliever is sold in slavery to sin; they are not free. The truth of God can set any person free. You can be free of sin's power and consequences in your life. That freedom saves you from the grasp of sin and creates unspeakable joy and opportunities in your life. You can have freedom to think and believe as He guides you. Freedom to be who you are; not who others want you to be. Freedom to think, plan, and do, according to His will; beyond anything you or anyone in your life thought possible.

Take 2 Heart

Summary

The Bible is designed to get divine truth from the mind of God to the minds of humans. God's Word was originally written as He breathed the words to the human authors; this process assured that the absolutely correct message was recorded. Those words have been faithfully transmitted through the centuries to assure that future generations also had the Word. The Bible is God's Word; we have it today and He has promised it will not pass away. In addition to having His Word, the Holy Spirit helps us correctly understand it. Each of us must study it and ask Him to guide our minds and thoughts. It is His truth which sets people free from sin, while creating fascinating hope and joy. It is an honor to hold in our hands the Word of God.

Gospel

Because of sin there is a huge gulf (like a monstrous crack in the earth) between God and us. It is the death

of Jesus Christ that provides forgiveness of sin. That forgiveness bridges the gulf between God and mankind and is the basis of our salvation. Eph 1:7 reads, **"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace ..."** If you place your faith in Christ as your substitute for your sin, then you will become His saint. Jesus Christ is the only way to bridge the gulf between you and God (1 Tim. 2:5).

Encouragement

You may be considered odd for believing the Bible. Please recall the millions of believers over the centuries that have given their lives so that we can have God's written Word in truth and purity. May the Lord guide your study of the Word and as you do He will enrich your life. As your faith in Him grows, you will value the written Word more each day; this will help you experience the inner joy and hope mentioned in the Bible.