

INTRODUCTION: KNOWING GOD'S WORD – THE BIBLE

Several years ago, the Lord had me ask a question to those that I came in contact with. The question was, "How many books are there in the bible?" Now that seemed like an easy question to me since I knew the answer. What I learned shocked me.

Almost none of the people that said they went to church and were Christians knew the answer. I asked a chaplain at Hospice, and he didn't even know. He told me the reason that I knew the answer was because I was a pastor. I told him that was a lame excuse for his not knowing. About a week later he came to our church thrift shop and apologized to my husband for his answer. He said he had talked with his pastor, and the pastor told him that everyone should know the answer.

The answer is 66. There are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the new Testament. If we don't know our bible, then how can we do what **1 Peter 3:15** says,

"But sanctify [honor] the Lord God in your hearts: and BE READY ALWAYS to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."

It is our intention through this fourth edition of our ministry school to lay a sure foundation built upon the word of God so we can always be ready to give an answer. May God bless you in this journey of faith.

WHY SHOULD WE KNOW THE BIBLE?

Christians should know the bible for many reasons, but the primary one is because God is its author. All Bible students know that God is Creator, (**Genesis 1:1**) Redeemer, (**Isaiah 60:16**), and Judge (**Genesis 18:25**), but do we think of Him as the Author of the bible? Human writers feel it vital that we read their books; it is much more important that we read God's book, the bible.

About *fourteen centuries before Christ*, our bible had its beginnings in the Sinai desert. In this arid place God spoke to Moses, who had once been a prince in Egypt, and was nearly 120 years old at the time. At the Lord's command, Moses picked up his pen and began writing the first five books of scripture, called the Pentateuch (which means 5) Genesis, through Deuteronomy. More than 1,500 years later, the divine manuscript was completed on a lonely, windswept island in Mediterranean Sea by a former fisherman, John the apostle. From Genesis through Revelation, the final biblical book, there are *66 divinely inspired* books.

Over the centuries, approximately forty men and women – representing varied backgrounds and writing styles – served as channels for God's Word. Yet, in spite of these variations in time and

talent, the completed work displays a marvelous historical, theological, geographical, topical, and biographical unity.

The Bible's practical benefits for us may well be summarized under two headings: **knowing and growing**. The Bible proclaims the good news of the gospel that we might know God; it explains the will of God that all of us may grow spiritually before Him.

Scripture also reveals our place within God's program and answers crucial questions pertaining to our origin, purpose, and destiny. Because God has revealed His unchanging truths, the Christian faith provides real answers and guidance to every generation. Although we cannot grasp how individual events fit into God's program, (Eccl. 11:5) we can understand God's basic plan in order to come to know and serve Him. Few joys can compare with realizing our places in God's program and working to fulfill our destinies.

Keep in mind that the bible is not a book of philosophy, although it philosophical. Do not go to the Bible for a scientific treatise, however, there is no discrepancy between ascertained facts of science and the bible.

The bible is not a book of history, but it is found to be accurate when recording history. The bible was given to man from God, revealing Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and God the Son, the only Savior (John 14:6). He is the center and the circumference. It is Christ from Genesis to Revelation (John 5:39)

The Bible is as high above all other books as the heavens are above the earth. Someone has said of the Bible: "Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be right."

A. REVELATION OF GOD'S WORD

Revelation may be defined as that process by which God imparted to man truths which he otherwise could not know. The details of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 are an example of revelation. As man was not created until the sixth day, we could not have possibly known the events occurring prior to this until God gave the facts to Moses.

We know God spoke to the human authors of our bible; but just how did He speak? Was it in Hebrew? Greek? Angelic language? He spoke to them in their own language. God's call to young Samuel in the temple (1 Samuel 3:1-10) proves this, for the boy at first mistook God's voice for that of the aged priest Eli. Sometimes God spoke through angels: Gabriel was sent from heaven to tell Mary she would give birth to the Messiah (Luke 1:26-37). On other occasions the Lord spoke directly to a man, as He did to Noah concerning the great flood (Genesis 6:13-21)

One of God's methods of communication in Scripture is to reveal His message through dreams and visions: The wise men were warned in a dream not to return to Herod (Matthew 2:12) while Peter was later instructed in a vision to minister to Cornelius (Acts 10:10-16)

God has communicated in many different ways. He revealed Himself to Moses from a burning bush (**Exodus 3:4**) and to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam out of a cloud (**Numbers 12: 4, 5**).

One of the most important ways that divine truths were given in the Old Testament was through the Angel of the Lord. Most Bible students perceive this heavenly messenger to be the pre-incarnate Christ, Himself. For example, it is the angel of the Lord who reassured Joshua on the eve of a battle. **Joshua 5:13-15. 13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? 14 and he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, what saith my lord unto his servant? 15 And the captain of the LORD'S host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy, and Joshua did so.**

B. INSPIRATION OF GOD'S WORD

The word inspiration is found but once in the New Testament and that is in **II Timothy 3:16** - which says **"that All scripture is given by inspiration of God"** which literally means God-breathed. Divine Inspiration logically follows divine revelation. In **revelation** God speaks to man's ear while by **inspiration** He guides the pen to ensure that the imparted message is correctly written down.

There are several ideas about the process of inspiration.

1. One is called the **natural theory**. This says that the Bible authors were inspired in the same sense that William Shakespeare or any other writer was inspired.
2. Another theory, called the **content theory**, suggests that God merely gave the writer the main content or idea, allowing him to choose his own words to express that concept.

In contrast Jesus Himself said that the very letters of the words were also chosen by God (**Matthew 5:18**), **"For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."**

3. This position is referred to as the **plenary-verbal view**, which says that all (plenary) the words (verbal) of the bible are inspired by God. Jesus once told the devil that the Christian is to live by each of these inspired words. (**Matt. 4:4**)
4. The **Holy Spirit is the author** of the Bible.

The Bible authors understood that their writings were being guided by the Spirit of God, even as they wrote them. Peter said this was true of the Old Testament authors.

II Peter 1:20, 21 **"²⁰Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. ²¹for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."**

Finally, he pointed out that this was also true concerning Paul's writings.

II Peter 3:15-16 *"15 And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; 16 As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction"*

II Peter 1:21 *"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."*

Christ told His disciples that He would leave "many things" unrevealed, and the Holy Spirit would come and choose certain persons and through them reveal His perfect will unto man; and that the Holy Spirit would be the believer's teacher.

John 16: 12-15 : *"¹² I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. ¹³ Howbeit, when he, the spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come. ¹⁴ He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. ¹⁵ All things that the Father hath are mine; therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it you."*

Man is the instrument used by the Holy Spirit to write the Bible. Results: the infallible word of God therefore, the Bible is free from error and absolutely trustworthy.

Psalms 119:89

"Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven. "

Matthew 24:35

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

One final thing should be said about inspiration. Plenary-verbal (all verbal) inspiration does not guarantee the inspiration of any translation, but only of the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.

C. GOD'S WORD ILLUMINATES

The Bible is a difficult book because it came from the infinite to the finite – from the unlimited, all-powerful God, to limited man. Therefore, you cannot understand the Bible as you would understand the writings of Plato or Socrates. You can study the great philosophers with the natural mind, and by diligent application, grasp their profound meanings. If the Bible could be understood by natural man, it would be a natural book and could not be the Word of God.

Since, the Bible is from God, and therefore spiritual, before you can receive its teachings, you must be born of the Spirit, and filled with the Spirit, then, illumination will come. Always approach the Bible praying that the Holy Spirit will be your teacher and will guide you to a better understanding of His Holy Word (illuminate) or it will remain a difficult closed book.

Illumination is the last of three important steps taken by God in communicating His Word to us. The first step we talked about was **revelation**, which occurred when God spoke to bible authors.

The second step we talked about is **inspiration** – the process whereby God guided Holy men of old in correctly writing or uttering His message.

Now a third step is needed to provide understanding for men and women as they hear God's revealed and inspired message. This vital step is **illumination**, that divine process whereby God causes the written revelation to be understood by the human heart.

This third step of illumination is needed because unsaved man is blinded by his fallen, fleshly nature.

I Cor. 2:14

“But the natural man (unsaved man) receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

Also, Satan blinds: **II Cor. 4:3-4** ***“³ But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: ⁴ In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”***

The person behind this illumination is the Holy Spirit. Just prior to His crucifixion, Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit, who would illuminate both unsaved people and saved.

An example of unsaved is: **John 16: 8-11** ***⁸ And when he is come (speaking of the Holy Spirit) he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: ⁹Of sin, because they believe not on me; ¹⁰ Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me to more; ¹¹ Of judgment because the prince of this world is judged.***

An example of saved (Christians) is **John 14:26** ***²⁶ But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.***

John 16:13-14 ***¹³Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come. ¹⁴He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.***

An important example of the Holy Spirit's using God's Word to illuminate sinners is seen at Pentecost, where three thousand people are saved after hearing Simon Peter preach about Christ and the Cross. See **Acts 2:36-41**

Christians also need this illumination to help them fully grasp the marvelous message in God's Word. Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit will show these tremendous truths to us as we read the Scriptures.

I Cor. 2:10

"But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." See Also II Cor. 4:6 "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

D. GOD'S WORD CONVICTS

Nehemiah 8:9

"⁹ And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, this day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law."

One of the great proofs that the Bible is really God's inspired Word is the unique ability to **convict** men and women of their sins. Let us consider but a few Old and New Testament examples which demonstrate the lifesaving power of the Scriptures.

OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES:

1. Josiah, a young and godly Judean king who ruled the Lord's people more than six centuries before Christ, succeeds a wicked ruler who hated righteousness. At the beginning of Josiah's rule, a copy of God's Word is found in the temple. When it is read to the king, both he and his people are convicted of their sins in not keeping God's law. A great revival takes place.

II Chronicles 34: 18-21

"¹⁸ then Shaphan, the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.

¹⁹ and it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes.

²⁰ and the king commanded Hilkiah and Ahikan the son of Shaphan, and Abdon, the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah, a servant of the king's saying,

²¹ go, enquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book.

2. Nehemiah returns to help the returning Jews rebuild the gates in the Jerusalem wall. This great wall builder thinks the Word of God to be so important that he assembles the people and has the Scriptures read to them for three hours per day. This soon causes them to confess their sins.

Nehemiah 9:3 –

^{“3} And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed and worshipped the LORD their God.

NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES:

1. Before Jesus left this earth He promised that the Holy Spirit would soon come upon the apostles. (John 16:8) *^{“8} and when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment.”*
2. There are many instances in the New Testament where we see the Holy Spirit using God’s Word to convict people of their sin. At Pentecost, Peter uses the scriptures to rebuke Israel for crucifying its Messiah. This sermon results in three thousand souls being convicted and accepting Christ. (See Acts 2:37-41.)

E. GOD’S WORD CORRECTS

There are many symbols for God’s word that can be found in the bible itself. It can be thought of as:

1. **A mirror:** (James 1:23-25) *^{“23}For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass (mirror) ²⁴For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway, or immediately forgetteth what manner of man he was. ²⁵But whoso looketh into the perfect (complete) law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”*
2. **A seed:** (1 Peter 1:23) *^{“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.”}*
3. **A lamp:** (Ps. 119:105) *^{“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”}*

4. **A Sword:** (Ephesians 6:17) *“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”*

5. **Food:** (Hebrews 5:12-14) *“¹² For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. ¹³ For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. ¹⁴ but strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised (trained) to discern both good and evil.”*

3. **A MEASURING ROD OR RULER**

Many teachers have used wooden rulers in their classes not only to give the right measurement but on occasion to correct a misbehaving pupil. God’s Word likewise can do both of these things. It should be used as a standard against which to measure our beliefs. What about certain religious groups which claim Christ was not God, or that the bible is filled with silly tales, or errors? Immediately we can reject such claims by using our divine written ruler to discover that such arguments simply do not measure up. Sometimes our heavenly teacher uses His written ruler to correct us when we are in the wrong. Israel’s great King, David, once experienced this.

In Psalm 119:65 it says *“Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD, according unto thy word* and verse 67 says *“before I was afflicted, I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.”*

There are times when God’s Word can correct believers when they are in honest and unintentional error. In Acts 18: 24-26, Aquila and Priscilla, a godly Christian couple, use the Scriptures to help a powerful young preacher named Apollos. In Acts 19:1-7 Paul does the same thing for some former disciples of John the Baptist he meets in the city of Ephesus.

F. **HOW WE BENEFIT FROM GOD'S WORD**

1. **We know God through His Word**

One of the most vital teachings of Scripture is that **God can be known**. The highest knowledge to which men and women can attain is a personal knowledge of God.

(Jeremiah 9:24) *“But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me; that I am the LORD, which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.*

a. **People do not naturally possess this knowledge**

(Romans 3: 10-11). ¹⁰ *As it is written, There is none righteous, no not one: ¹¹ There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.*

b. Even though they know that He exists

(Psalm 14: 1) *The fool hath said in his heart, 'There is no God'.*

(Romans 1: 19-20) *"¹⁹ Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. ²⁰ For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so that they are without excuse:*

Knowing God exists is not the same as knowing God personally, just as knowing about the President does not mean that you necessarily know him personally. This knowledge of God is crucial, however, since to know God personally is to be saved, and have eternal life.

(John 17:3) *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*

People should rejoice in the fact that God earnestly wants them to attain this knowledge. That is why He has spoken to us in His Word, revealing Himself, and disclosing the means by which we may know Him.

While God surely can be known, **there is always more to be learned about Him**. There are many Scriptures which teach that our knowledge of God is partial. It is said to be "too wonderful," (Psalm 139:6) "unsearchable," (Psalm 145:3 and Romans 11:33) and "infinite" (Psalm 147:5).

Since our knowledge of God is incomplete, we must increase it through spiritual growth. Paul, for example, prays to know God better (Phil. 3:10). We are even commanded to grow in the knowledge of Christ (II Peter 3:18). The development of one's intimate knowledge of God constitutes one of the greatest delights of the Christian life.

c. God cannot be known personally apart from His word.

The Bible contains the gospel which must be believed (Ephesians 1: 13), and the gospel brings forth saving faith in itself (Romans 10: 17). The gospel can therefore be called "the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1: 16). The part that the Scriptures and the gospel contained with them play in bringing men to God is described in three important illustrations:

1. The gospel is the agent of the **new birth** (James 1: 18) that is, it is like the implanted seed without which the conception of new life cannot occur;

2. The gospel is also a **cleansing agent** through which God gives the believing sinner a spiritual bath that results in salvation (Ephesians 5 :26).
3. The Scriptures are like an **educator** bringing the wisdom that leads to salvation. (II Timothy 3: 15).

d. We Know God's Will Through His word.

Knowing the will of God must not be thought of merely as finding a certain vocation in life. That aspect represents only a small part of God's will. Rather, the will of God is for everyone to live in conformity to His revealed will in His word.

1. First of all, and most important, the will of God means believing in Christ.

(John 6:40) *And this is the will of him that sent me that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day.*

If we do not take this first step in doing God's will, we will not be saved from judgment (Matt, 7:21; 12:50)

Matthew 7:21. *“Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”*

Matthew 12:50 *“For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”*

If we do this first step, we will live forever (1 John 2:17)

2. Second, there are clear statements of Scripture which teach that God's will for every Christian include:

a. sanctification (to be set apart to a sacred purpose or to religious use: consecrate; to free from sin; purify; to impart or impute sacredness, inviolability, or respect to; to give moral or social sanction to)

(I Thess. 4:3) *For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:*

b. Giving thanks to God (1 Thess. 5:18) *In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

c. Doing good. (I Peter 2: 15) *For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.*

d. Suffering for doing the right thing. (I Peter 3: 1 7) *For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.*

3. Thirdly, the Bible is God's will and must be applied to our lives (Deut. 29:29)

This fact involves commands to be obeyed, principles to be followed, prohibitions of things to be avoided and living examples to be imitated or shunned.

An attitude of delight and desire should fill all attempts to do God's will (Psalm 40:8) God takes great joy in those who cheerfully do his will. Although the bible is a complete revelation of God's will, there are always decisions we must make that are not covered by specific statements of scripture.

For each of us individually to know God's will in such instances we must:

1. be in fellowship with the Lord (I John 1 :6,7),
2. seek principles from the Word (1 Cor. 10:6),
3. obtain advice from godly counselors (Prov. 11: 14), 15 :22; 24:6),
4. use common sense,
5. remember that God works through our own minds and desires to do His will. (Phil. 2: 13).

When none of these principles seem to work, we must simply make the best possible decision, realizing that God will shut the door if it is not His will. Paul, for example, planned to go and see the Roman Christians although not knowing if God would actually permit it in His will (Romans 15:22-32). In most cases, however, the believer who thoroughly searches the Word will find the basis for an intelligent Spirit-led decision.