

May 28, 2023

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Acts 2:1-13, 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Inspired by the Holy Spirit



The Bible is the most amazing book in the history of the world. Without question it is the most read, studied, and translated book in all of history. But there is a problem with it. No instruction manual on how to use it. II Timothy claims that all of it is useful. But with stories about talking donkeys, children taunting bald men and being attacked by a bear, and claims that the sky is held up by pillars makes Paul's claim in Timothy spurious at best.

It seems unfortunate that God does not use the latest modern technology which I experienced to great blessing a few months ago.

I was driving familiar territory on the way to Princeton, but construction had blocked the normal route. I fired up Google Maps and thank goodness it had been updated! Right away I was back on the best path to finish my trip!

Wouldn't it be wonderful if God sent updates to scripture? These updates could answer directly some of the more thorny problems of the modern age. When is war appropriate in today's world given our supreme destructive capabilities but without letting innocents to be massacred? Should we use genetic modifications to cure diseases in-utero? How much should I pledge to the church? How should we balance compassion for desperate families with the need for enforcement of laws? What is the right degree of separation between church and state? Did Jesus truly

mean it when he told us to forgive others 77 times 7! A few years ago, was 29-year-old Brittany Maynard of Oregon justified in taking her own life so that she was in control of her fate rather than the cancer ravaging her brain? These are not simple questions. It would relieve us of a great deal of anxiety and grave mistakes if God would only send us the Bible 2.0.

And yet, somehow the Bible is meant to be our unique and authoritative guide. I know many of you struggle embracing this concept with the clear problematic view of women amongst other things, the seeming wanton violence that God's very self commits and the outdated science it includes. Thomas Jefferson's solution was to mark out those passages he didn't like!

*...by cutting and pasting with a razor and glue numerous sections from the New Testament as extractions of the doctrine of Jesus. Jefferson's condensed composition excludes all miracles by Jesus and most mentions of the supernatural, including sections of the four gospels that contain the Resurrection and most other miracles, and passages that portray Jesus as divine. (Wikipedia).*

Jefferson tells us his motivation:

*In extracting the pure principles which he taught, we should have to strip off the artificial vestments in which they have been muffled by priests, who have travestied them*

*into various forms, as instruments of riches and power to them. ...shall I say at once, of nonsense.*

Although God has not given us a user manual, nor those constant annoying updates, of course God in His wisdom has given us something much better – the Holy Spirit.

On this day of Pentecost in which the Spirit poured power into the hearts of the disciples and more, this same Spirit gives us the means by which to understand the Truth of scripture, Truth with a capital “T”!

It is through reliance on the Holy Spirit that we are able to discern how the Bible’s instruction from one age translates into guidance for our life today.

John Calvin writes, *“the Word will not find acceptance in men’s hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit.”* And the Westminster catechism observes, *“Only the witness of the Holy Spirit in the human heart can finally persuade a person that scripture is the word of God.”*

We must rely on the Spirit in reading scripture because words on a page without the infusion of God’s presence are nothing more than wasted ink. Unfortunately, we can see this truth through the history of errors and evil committed through abuse of God’s Word. According to legend, Origen, an ancient theologian, castrated himself based on Jesus words, *“If you’re right eye causes you to sin tear it out.”* Jesus was speaking metaphorically not literally! In the medieval ages kings quoted Romans 12, *“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.”* in order to justify complete

authoritarian control over their subjects. Obviously, God did not intend these words to give dictatorial control to kings. Knowing God’s will for us today is not as simple as reading words on a page.

God seems to have made it doubly difficult. Not only does the Bible not update itself but it also comes to us through the culture of its day and the eccentricities of its authors. But of course, God has a reason, a plan, which will do something more wonderful and more challenging than we could ever receive in a Bible that was updated or one that was dictated. The key comes from a word that Paul invented for this passage – *Theopneustos*.

It is a conjunction of the word “God” and “breathed”. *“All scripture has been breathed into being by God.”* God breathed into the hearts of humans. God inspired them and then they wrote it.

God did not dictate the Bible. Timothy does not read, *“All scripture was written by God.”* This is how Muslims understand their sacred texts. Muslims believe that the Angel Gabriel dictated the Koran to Mohammed.

Reading scripture as a disciple is a process of getting back to that same moment, that same experience that inspired the text to begin with. In order to know God’s meaning, we too must be breathed into by God. Knowing the Truth comes from being connected to the source of Truth.

Every Saturday morning as a teenager when I went to the fridge for some breakfast, I would find a Post-It Note with chores and instructions for the day (my mother was no dummy, she knew a teenage

boy sooner rather than later would be in the kitchen!). I didn't exactly rejoice upon seeing the list but after I had finished it, I knew I was square with the house and the day was mine. But God demands more than this. We are purposely not given a list to follow but something deeper.

In Jeremiah, God declares, *"I will put my law within you. I will write it upon your hearts."* Ultimately, Truth is not a list of propositions about God that the Bible teaches us. Truth is something that comes alive within us. It is a seed God plants within us.

It is like the student who sits at the piano for years with her incredible teacher. She takes in all the instruction she can, she practices endlessly, and then one day her instructor is absent, and she plays, something new, something born from all she was taught but from not rote memorization, the music is a part of her, and it comes to life through her both in a unique way, but one born from her mentor.

Paul writes that we are to be transformed. God wants us our obedience to come from within. Scripture is meant to shape us, not to dictate to us. Certainly, God wants us to obey the Word because these are divine commands, but more than that God wants us as Paul writes, *"To grow up into the full stature of Christ."* Which comes from the indwelling of the Spirit.

This is why we can't update scripture. In the same way that Google updates its map software, God leaves us room for us to grow.

By leaving a gap between the age in which scripture was written and our day we

are forced to seek out the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are forced to consider the implications of these difficult questions that face us today. This dialogue, this wrestling between the text and today's world engages the depth of our heart leading us into a prayerful seeking disposition.

That is the crucible in which we become obedient from the heart, in which we grow up into the full stature of Christ.

Second Corinthians 3:3 explains, *"and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."* This leads to God's ultimate intention. We are not to believe something because it is in the Bible but because we have been convicted of its truth from within.

The Holy Spirit's quickening presence in our reading of scripture should guide us. Each time we open its pages we should come with the words of that hymn on our heart:

*Open my eyes, that I may see  
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;  
Place in my hands the wonderful key  
That shall unclasp and set me free.*

*Silently now I wait for Thee,  
Ready my God, Thy will to see,  
Open my eyes, illumine me,  
Spirit divine!*

Amen.

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