

# THE BIBLE

## Lesson 2

### The Essence and Function of the Bible

Scripture Reading: John 5:39; 6:63; 2 Tim. 3:15-16; 1 Pet. 1:23; 2:2; Matt. 4:4; 2 Pet. 1:19

#### I. If we want to know God's Word, we must know the essence of God's Word; the Word of God is the Bible:

- A. God's Word is God's breathing out—2 Tim. 3:16:
  - 1. The Bible is God's breathing out; that is, it is the breath breathed out by God.
  - 2. To God it is a matter of breathing out; to us it is a matter of breathing in.
  - 3. Through God's breathing out and our breathing in, God's word enters into us and becomes our life and life supply.
- B. The Word of the Lord is spirit and life—John 6:63:
  - 1. John 6:63 says that the Lord's words are spirit and life; the Bible is full of the life of God; hence, it can supply us with life:
  - 2. First, the Lord indicated that for giving life He would become the Spirit [1 Cor. 15:45]; then He said that the words He speaks are spirit and life; this shows that His spoken words are the embodiment of the Spirit of life.
  - 3. He is now the life-giving Spirit in resurrection, and the Spirit is embodied in His words; when we receive His words by exercising our spirit, we get the Spirit, who is life.
  - 4. We should regard the Bible as a book that is full of the life of God; when we read the Bible, we should obtain the life supply in it.
- C. The Bible not only contains life but also light—Psa. 119:130:
  - 1. Light is for revealing and enlightening; when God's word is opened, or unfolded, to us, it gives us light, shining inwardly over our heart and our spirit to impart wisdom and revelation to us—Eph. 1:17-18a.
  - 2. Hence, we should not regard the Bible as a common religious classic for the study of religious doctrine; the Bible is full of God's light.
  - 3. We read the Bible to be enlightened by God and to receive His revelation so that we may understand His intention and purpose toward us.
- D. Ultimately, the word in the Bible is God Himself; it is the embodiment of God Himself:
  - 1. This does not mean that we consider the words in black and white as the living God; what we mean is that the words in black and white contain God Himself.
  - 2. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was God"; this Word became flesh (v. 14), and His name is Jesus Christ.
  - 3. As the embodiment of God the Spirit, the Scripture (God's word) is also the embodiment of Christ; Christ is God's living Word (Rev. 19:13), and the Scripture is God's written word (Matt. 4:4).

#### II. We need to see the functions of the Bible:

- A. Testifying concerning the Lord Jesus (John 5:39)—the first function of the Bible is to testify concerning the Lord Jesus; the Lord Jesus is the subject and contents of the Bible (Matt. 1:1, note 1); the Bible is the explanation and expression of the Lord Jesus.

- B. Making men wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15)—the first function of the Bible *toward us* is to make us wise unto salvation; the Bible reveals to us how God saves men in Christ, and how men may be saved by faith, so that we may know the way of salvation.
- C. Causing men to be regenerated (1 Pet. 1:23)—the first practical function of the Bible *in us* is to cause us to be regenerated; when we receive the word of the Scriptures into us by faith, it comes into us like a seed of life, sowing God's life into us; thus, we have God's life and are regenerated.
- D. Being the believers' spiritual milk (1 Pet. 2:2)—some portions of the Scriptures are like milk that can nourish us and make us grow in our spiritual life; Peter said that we need to be like newborn babes desiring the guileless milk of the Word; God's Word is our milk; hence, we must drink it.
- E. Being the believers' bread of life (Matt. 4:4)—we must take the word of God as food and eat it (Jer. 15:16), even regarding the word of the Bible as more important than our food (Job 23:12b); otherwise, our spiritual life cannot grow; therefore, whenever we read the Bible, we must eat the bread of life, which is the Lord Himself—cf. John 6:35.
- F. Being the believers' lamp shining in a dark place (2 Pet. 1:19)—we are in a dark night because the age in which we live is dark (Rom. 13:12); in this darkness the Bible is like a shining lamp; if we want to be enlightened and knowledgeable in this dark age, we must understand the Bible and keep the word of the Bible in our hearts so that it can shine and enlighten us.
- G. Making the believers complete (2 Tim. 3:16-17)—after our regeneration, the Bible is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that we, the men of God, may be complete.

### III. We need to see the functions of God's law as His living word to His loving seekers:

- A. Giving light and life—Psa. 119:105, 25, 50, 107, 154.
- B. Restoring the soul and rejoicing the heart—Psa. 19:7-8.
- C. Bringing salvation—Psa. 119:41, 170.
- D. Strengthening, comforting, and nourishing—vv. 28, 76, 103.
- E. Upholding, keeping safe, and causing hope—vv. 116-117, 49.
- F. Causing us to enjoy God as our portion—v. 57.
- G. Causing us to enjoy God's countenance and the shining of His face—vv. 58, 135.
- H. Causing us to enjoy God as our hiding place and shield and also enjoy God's help and well-dealing—vv. 114, 175, 65.
- I. Making wise and giving understanding—vv. 98-99.
- J. Giving discernment and knowledge—v. 66.
- K. Keeping us from sinning and from every evil way—vv. 11, 101.
- L. Keeping us from stumbling, establishes our footsteps, and causes us to overcome iniquity—vv. 165, 133; the Word of God will make us conquerors, overcomers.
- M. If we would enjoy the function of God's law as His living word, we need to be God's loving seekers, those who seek Him out of love—cf. 1 Cor. 2:9.

## **Excerpts from the Ministry:**

### **READING THE BIBLE**

This lesson is to aid new believers in reading the Bible. The points in this lesson will be presented in a simple and practical way.

#### **THE BIBLE BEING THE WORD OF GOD**

New believers must know that the Bible is the word of God.

Second Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is God-breathed." Second Peter 1:21 says that the words in the Scriptures were written by men who were borne by the Holy Spirit. Since the Bible is the breathing of God Himself and is written by the prophets and apostles who were moved by the Spirit of God, it is the word of God.

#### **Containing Life**

The Bible contains life. John 5:39 says that there is eternal life in the Bible. John 6:63 says that the Lord's words are spirit and life. The Bible is full of the life of God; hence, it can supply us with life. The Bible even says that we can eat the words in the Scripture as food. Jeremiah 15:16 says, "Your words were found and I ate them." In Matthew 4:4 the Lord Jesus said, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God." These verses indicate that the Bible is full of the life supply, the bread of life, that nourishes us. These words not only nourish our spirit directly but also supply our soul and our body indirectly.

We should never consider the Bible to be a book of knowledge for study. Instead, we should regard the Bible as a book that is full of the life of God. When we read the Bible, we should obtain the life supply in it.

#### **Containing Light**

The Bible not only contains life but also light. Life is for supplying; light is for revealing and enlightening. Hence, we should not regard the Bible as a common religious classic for the study of religious doctrine. The Bible is full of God's light. We read the Bible to be enlightened by God and to receive His revelation so that we may understand His intention and purpose toward us.

If we see that the Bible is a book of life, we will not receive it as a book of knowledge for learning. If we see that the Bible is a book of light, we will not receive it as a common religious classic. These concepts need to be adjusted. We should take the Bible as a book that is full of life and full of light. The Word of God supplies us with the bread of life that nourishes our whole being because it contains life. The Word of God is also able to enlighten us concerning the will of God, the mystery of God, and the eternal plan of God because it is full of light. It can also manifest our true condition and enlighten us concerning the way that we should take, the things we should do, the work we should carry out, and the conduct we should have. This is a matter of enlightenment, not teaching; it is a matter of God's revelation in light, not religious doctrine.

One must have a clear understanding of these two characteristics of the Bible. Otherwise, he will spontaneously think that it contains teachings and knowledge. People inevitably consider the Bible as a classic teaching, a book of knowledge. Only those who have received revelation realize that this book is different from all other books. It is not an ordinary book; it is the book of books. This book is the word of God; it is the breathing of God through the Holy Spirit and was written by godly men in human language. Its content is altogether life and light. From this book, we obtain the life supply as nourishment for our entire being. We also obtain revelation in the light in order that we may know God's intention, our own condition, and how we should live and walk.

Thus, we must adjust our concept concerning the Bible. (Lessons for New Believers, Lesson Six, pp. 79-80)

### **KNOWING THE ESSENCE OF GOD'S WORD**

Now let us see the essence of God's Word in a simple way. If we want to know God's Word, we must know the essence of God's Word. The Word of God is the Bible. Its essence is:

#### **The Divine Breath**

God's Word is God's breathing out (2 Tim. 3:16). The Bible is God's breathing out; that is, it is the breath breathed out by God. The Bible is God's breathing. To God it is a matter of breathing out; to us it is a matter of breathing in. Through God's breathing out and our breathing in, God's word enters into us and becomes our life and life supply. Therefore, when we read the Bible, we must understand that the Bible is not merely black words on white paper, but it is the breathing out of God. It is full of spiritual breath. Therefore, we must not only understand the Bible with our mind, but we also must contact the word of the Bible with our spirit. Whenever we read the Bible we come to contact God.

#### **The Spiritual Milk**

The Bible is the spiritual milk. In 1 Peter 2:2 Peter said that we need to be like newborn babes desiring the guileless milk of the Word. In the Word of God there is the element of milk. This is also implied in Hebrews 5:12, which says, "You...have become those who have need of milk and not of solid food." God's Word is our spiritual breath; therefore, we must breathe it in. God's Word is also our milk; hence, we must drink it. We must desire the guileless milk of the Word.

#### **The Bread of Life**

God's Word is our bread of life, our food of life. This is indicated in Matthew 4:4, a word out of the Lord's mouth and a quote of Deuteronomy 8:3: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God." Therefore, whenever we read the Bible, we must breathe in the spiritual air, that is, the Spirit of God. We also must drink the spiritual milk and eat the bread of life, which is the Lord Himself.

#### **Spirit and Life**

The Word of the Lord is spirit and life. In John 6:63 the Lord Jesus said, "The words which I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life."

#### **Christ—God Himself**

The Word is God. The consummation of the Word is Christ Himself, because Christ is the Word of God. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was God." This Word became flesh, and His name is Jesus Christ. Ultimately, the word in the Bible is God Himself. It is the embodiment of God Himself. This does not mean that we consider the words in black and white as the living God. What we mean is that the words in black and white contain God Himself. This God is Christ; He is our bread of life. This Christ is also the Spirit, who becomes our spiritual milk and our spiritual breath.

Therefore, when we come to read the Bible and learn to understand the Bible, we must have the attitude that the Bible is different from the textbooks in the schools. They are merely black words on white paper, simply a matter of knowledge. The essence of God's Word, however, is the breathing out of God, God's spiritual breath. God's Word is also the spiritual milk and the bread of life. It is spirit and life, and it is even God Himself. Therefore, we need to understand God's Word and also enter into the essence of God's Word.

We human beings are created; we have a body, a soul with thoughts, emotions, desires, and intentions, and a spirit. God cannot simply be the Spirit and enter into our spirit; this is too intangible and impossible for us to understand. Therefore, God has worked in a wonderful way. He has given us both the Bible and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is contained within the Bible, and the Bible is carried within the Holy Spirit. They are mutually in one another; hence, the two are inseparable.

When we read the Bible, we touch the Spirit. When we touch the Spirit, the Bible is there as our practical support. We not only breathe in the spiritual breath, drink the spiritual drink, eat the spiritual food, and receive the Spirit and life, but we also have the clear Word to be our support, to satisfy our thinking and our thoughts. Here we can see the wonderful work of God. Not only do we have the Holy Spirit, but we also have the Bible. We cannot separate the two. If we read the Lord's Word daily, the Lord's Word will enter into us. Then we will know it and understand it. (*The Full Knowledge of the Word of God*, Chapter One, pp. 15-17)

### **THE FUNCTION OF GOD'S LAW AS HIS LIVING WORD TO HIS LOVING SEEKERS**

If we would enjoy the function of God's law as His living word, we need to be God's loving seekers, those who seek Him out of love. If we do not regard God's law as His breath and if we do not lovingly seek Him, we shall not experience the positive function of the law. We may read the words of the law, but we shall not be supplied with what God is by the law, and the law will not operate in us in a positive way. In other words, we shall not experience the function of God's law as His living word.

Suppose you want to use a certain electrically powered machine. If the machine is to function, it must be plugged into an electrical outlet. It would be foolish to expect a machine to run if it has not been plugged in. When electricity flows into the machine, the machine will operate. Moreover, you need to be alert and pay attention to the machine. You should not turn it on and then go to sleep, expecting it to run on its own. In like manner, if we want the Word of God to function properly in our experience, we need to be "plugged in" to the divine current whenever we read it. We do this by taking the Word into us as the very breath of God. Also, we should not be sleepy or indifferent. We must be God's genuine seekers. Then in our experience we shall have the functions of the Word of God.

When we speak of the function of the law as the living word of God, we are actually speaking of the function or operation of God Himself. The function of the Word of God is the operation of God. Because the Word of God is the breath of God, it is one with God. Just as it is not possible to separate the breath of a living person from the person himself, so we should not separate the Word of God from God Himself. This is the error made by many Jews in reading the Old Testament and by many Christians in reading the Bible as a whole. They read the Scriptures and study them, but in so doing they do not have direct contact with God. The result is that in their hands the Bible becomes a book of dead letters.

In John 5:39 and 40 the Lord Jesus said to the Pharisees, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is these that testify concerning Me; and you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." Although the ancient religionists researched the Scriptures, they separated them from the Lord Himself and would not come to Him to receive eternal life. Eternal life is in Christ. If we read the Bible without contacting Him, we shall not receive life. Then in our experience the Bible will be a book of dead letters. Life is a living Person, Christ Himself. We should not separate the Scriptures from this living Person. The functions of the law as God's living word are actually the moving and working of God Himself.

As God's living word, the law gives man light (Psa. 119:105). Only God is light (1 John 1:5). In themselves the printed letters of the Bible are not light and cannot give us light. At most, the Bible in letters can give us knowledge. Light comes only from God Himself. Thus, if we would receive light from the Word of God, we must contact God as we read it. This indicates that the function of the Word of God is the function of God Himself, God's own working. For this reason, we do not want to use the Bible to form a systematic theology. Our aim is to enjoy the Word with its living functions. (*Life-study of Exodus*, Message 58, pp. 677-688)

**References and Further Reading:**

1. *Lessons for New Believers*, Lesson 6
2. *The Full Knowledge of the Word of God*, Chapter 1
3. *Life-study of Exodus*, Message 58