

The Bible
The Complete Manual
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We often say that the Bible is the word of God while almost immediately finding reasons why we may dismiss much of what it says. It is a unique book for which God makes exclusive claims, voiced through the people He chose to write it. It is this human aspect that gives many the confidence to subject it to personal interpretation and criticism; effectively changing what it says, and therefore not only what we believe, but also *who* we believe. Our reaction to its contents is a spontaneous demonstration of our *faith* – who as well as what we believe.

Many suggest that the *numerous times* the Bible has been translated make it an unreliable source. This not only reflects upon God's ability to keep His word trustworthy, it conveniently grants others the opportunity to introduce *their solutions*. The fact is that *translations* are made from the available Greek manuscripts. There are versions of the Bible which are not translations, but *paraphrases* by men who put it into their own words, what they believe the text says. *The Living Bible* by Kenneth N. Taylor is an example of a paraphrased version of the Bible.

The many translations directly from the Greek text remove our excuses, rather than support them. Not only are we able to compare translations when there is a question about the translation of a specific passage, we are also able to find synonyms for those words we may have difficulty with by reading another translation.

Objectivity is a real problem for all of us. It is difficult not to be influenced by a consciousness which grew over years and more importantly, by *what we want*. The challenge is to look for what God says, and not what we want. (2Timothy 4:3) It is the *uncomfortable* demands of the Bible that most often causes us to question its authenticity. It is important to notice that this demand for change in our lives – repentance – have caused many to work on the writings of Paul, *written according to the wisdom given him, even in its original form*. (2Peter 3:15-16) Peter points out that some were distorting Paul's writings as they *do also the rest of the Scriptures*.

Through the apostle Paul God informs us that the Bible is the complete *manual* for the Christian to use in order to please Him: *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,*¹⁷ *that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*. (2Timothy 3:16-17 NKJV)

At the time Paul wrote this statement only the Old Testament was available in written form. The New Testament, explaining how God planned to *reconcile all things to Himself* through the blood of Jesus (Colossians 1:20), was not available in the complete, written form as we have it now. It was in the process of being revealed: *...which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:*⁶ *that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel*, (Ephesians 3:5-6 NKJV)

In the absence of the complete revelation of the new covenant (Hebrews 8:8-13) Christians of the first century received it in parts by means of the gifts of the Spirit. Once the revelation was completed, the parts would be done away with. (1Corinthians 13:8-10) We now have it in its complete written form, and as we have noticed, the writings of Paul are specifically referred to as part of *the rest of the Scriptures* as he wrote with *the wisdom given him, or by inspiration of God*.

In 2Timothy 3:16 we find the first of two purpose statements, the reason the Scriptures were given for; *...profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*. *Doctrine* and *instruction in righteousness* are both positive ways in which to transfer the will of God to the *hearts* and *minds* of *those who diligently seek Him*, as a result of their faith in Him. (Hebrews 11:6; 8:10)

Many object to the idea of preaching or teaching *doctrine*. Each creed of every denomination contains doctrine they expect their members to adhere to. Those who violate these may be asked to leave, although they may not be considered lost. Someone rightly suggested that this would mean that it is more difficult to be a member of a denomination than it is to make it to heaven. The freedom of interpretation demanded when reading the doctrine of the Bible is therefore not extended in the case of the doctrine of men – they demand obedience.

As the Head of His church, which is His body consisting of those who obey Him, Jesus makes the rules with the authority of the Father. (**Ephesians 1:22-23; Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:47**) These rules are conveyed to us through the Scriptures – *profitable for doctrine*. God expects those who desire to be part of Christ, and therefore of Him, to *abide in the teaching of Christ*. (**2John 1:9; Matthew 15:9**)

Reproof and *correction* are *negatives* because they demand judgment by the one who uses the Scriptures to reprove and correct. *Judgment* of the actions should not be done according to personal, frivolous standards where we ignore our mistakes (**Matthew 7:1**), it should be done according to the righteous standard God supplied us with in the Scriptures. (**John 7:24**)

The second purpose statement sprouts from the first to say that the Bible supplies us with *all* we need to in order to please God – *that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*. The terms used leaves no room for confusion as to the *completeness* of the Scriptures. Those with a personal agenda, or who do not like what it says, will attack the authority of the Scriptures just like those who twisted what Paul wrote in its untranslated form.

Immediately after making this profound statement concerning the all sufficiency of the Scriptures God adds this statement: *I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom:* ² *Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.* ³ *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;* ⁴ *and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.* (**2Timothy 4:1-4 NKJV**)

Question: When you consider the idea that one could visit different denominations to establish where you *feel at home*, do you see denominationalism as the answer to Jesus' prayer that all may be one as He and the Father is one (**John 17:20-23**), or do you see it as a fulfillment of this prophecy given through Paul?: *...but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers.*

God declares the Bible to be a complete manual for those who desire to please Him. Those who seek to please Him should trust in His words, and not in the testimony of men, or in subjective feelings. *There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.* **Proverbs 14:12 NKJV**