**The Thing that Concerns Me Most About the Future…**

Is not a lack of faithfulness in brethren, or even the sinfulness of the world (or brethren). God’s people have always struggled with fidelity, and the world has always run to excesses of degradation and iniquity. But there has always been a *cure* for both conditions: the Word of God. *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for* ***teaching,*** *for* ***reproof****, for* ***correction****, for* ***training in righteousness****; that the man of God may be* ***adequate****,* ***equipped*** *for every good work,”* 2Timothy 3:16-17. Think carefully about how the Word of God has the power to redeem and complete us. It tells us:

* *What is* ***right***by *teaching;*
* *What is* ***wrong***by *reproof;*
* *How to* ***get right***by *correction;* and,
* *How to* ***stay right***by *training.*

The result is that man- regardless of previous status with God or condition in the world, can be ***fitted, complete, perfect***(or *whole*; such is the meaning of the Greek term *artios* as used in v.17).

Since the Word of God is such a powerful, *living, abiding,* and *imperishable seed* (cf. 1Peter 1:23), what could possibly make it impotent to accomplish mans redemption? A couple of things, actually:

1. Man’s unwillingness to *read* it, Ephesians 3:3-5.
2. Man’s unwillingness to *abide* in it, John 8:31-32.

Certainly our unwillingness to *read* and *abide/obey* the Word thwarts its potency to do what God intended it to accomplish- the salvation of man, Romans 1:16. But, these are not my primary concern for us going forward….

What concerns me most is the apparent unwillingness of people (and brethren?) to put in the effort required to understand what God’s Word actually says and means- and doesn’t say and can’t mean. Perhaps we preachers (and church leadership also) have been so concerned with manifesting and emphasizing the “right” answers to life’s issues and questions from the Bible that we’ve failed to teach folks how to discern the truth from the sacred Text for themselves. Even some who are willing to read the Book don’t seem to be able to reach sound conclusions regarding what they read. Basic interpretive tools and hermeneutical skills are diminishing and trending toward extinct. (*Hermeneutics* is the *science* and *methodology* of *interpretation-* especially the Bible.) They must be, how else can some of the doctrines, ideas, and conclusions currently being accepted and circulated be reached? I am at complete loss to explain them through any other means! Such as:

* The acceptance of women in pulpits and public leadership positions in light of 1Tim.2:12ff;
* The acceptance of mechanical instruments of music in “Christian” worship despite the complete lack of authority for such in the New Testament, 1Cor.4:1-6;
* The acceptance of “belief/faith only” as the means to salvation in spite of Jas.2:24;
* The acceptance of *premarital sex* (fornication)*, post-marital sex* (adultery), *homosexuality* (same-gender sex), and *transgenderism* (in all its forms) despite 1Cor.6:9-10; and,
* Etc. Etc. Etc.

There is just no way to legitimately *read* and *understand* the New Testament and come up with these conclusions! Its one thing for *the world* to reach such suppositions- they’re not reading let alone trying to obey the Word. But how are those who suppose themselves “Christians” trying to *live the Word* deducing these doctrines from the Text? There are a couple of possibilities:

1. They’re not actually reading *the Text.* Just like the Internet and Social Media are full of “fake news,” the Bible stores are becoming full of “fake Bibles.” Bibles are being sold in which the *original language* (Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic) is being *interpreted* rather than *translated-* or, even if accurately *translated,* the books are filled with “explanatory notes” to “help” you “see” that it doesn’t *really* say what it *actually* says. Don’t buy a Bible “translated” and published by a denomination or for a particular group; denominations are wrong (Eph.4:4-5), and the Bible is for everyone (Rom.1:16). This is bad ***information****.*
2. They’re not actually readingthe Text *for themselves.* They’re letting *wolves in sheep’s clothing,* that are looking to win popularity by becoming more like the world, tell them what it “says” and “means,” Matt.7:13-23. Build your *faith* and *hope “upon the rock,”* Matt.7:24-27. This bad ***methodology****.*
3. They’re not actually *reading* (the Text)- at least not for the purpose of *discerning* and *obeying truth.* Instead, they are *loophole looking* and *proof-text practicing.* That is, they are looking for ways to *avoid* doing what the Bible actually requires, and for passages they can twist to mean what they want them to say, Matt.22:23-33. This bad **purpose**, cp, Ezra 7:10.

So what’s the solution?

* Read the *actual* Text (accurately translated) *for yourself* to *know, understand,* and *obey* the Truth, John 8:31-32. This is the **right information** and the **right purpose**.
* Read *entire sentences* without respect to verse numbers (cf. Eph.1:4b-6); read *entire books* without respect to chapter numbers (Romans and Hebrews). This is the right **methodology/hermeneutic** (along with the following…)
* Context. Context. Context. *Specific* context refers to what is *immediately* being said in the surrounding verse. *General* context is what is being said in the paragraph or book. *Universal* context is what is said in the rest of the Bible (particular to the subject under consideration). The meaning of a passage is determined by and dependent upon its *specific* context, its *general* context, and its *universal* context. If an interpretation of a passage doesn’t agree with all of these, IT’S THE WRONG INTERPRETATION!
* The *Harmony/Agreement* of the Scriptures is truly amazing…. and amazingly helpful to our understanding. Therefore, read all that a sentence, its paragraph, its chapter/Book, and the rest of the Bible has to say on the subject to be sure your interpretation *agrees* with them.
* God’s power to save is invested in the gospel, Rom.1:16. But our access to its power is limited by our willingness to *read it*, our ability to *understand it*, and our willingness to *abide in it,* John 8:31-32.