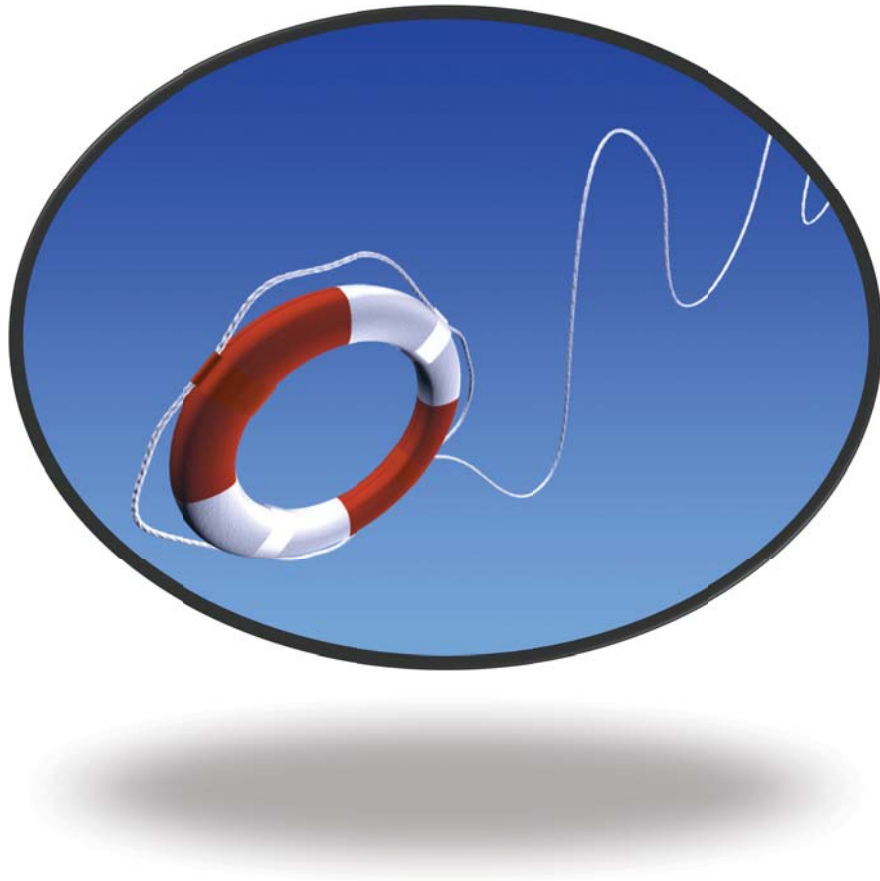


ABLE TO SAVE



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Able to Save

Able to Save
T. M. Moore
Susie Moore, Editor and Finisher

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Welcome to *Able to Save*

The promise of Scripture is that it is able to save our soul. The Bible possesses power to do a work within us that makes all things new, and that sets us on a path of joy and rejoicing as a way of life.

How does that happen? What do we need to do to tap into that power? What kind of power is it, anyway, and to what ends is it directed?

These are some of the questions we explore in this series as we consider the saving power of the Word of God, its ability to transform us, within and without, increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 The Planting of the Word

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God... 2 Timothy 3.16

The implanted Word

The Apostle James wrote of the Scriptures that they are “able to save your souls” (Jms. 1.21). This is, by any standard of literature, a remarkable claim. Let’s not pass lightly over it.

How is a book, even the divinely-inspired Bible, able to *save* someone’s *soul*?

Soul and *salvation* were concepts with which James’ readers would have been quite familiar. As we have seen, the *soul* of a person is that immaterial, unseen aspect of our being – comprised of mind, heart, and conscience – which gives shape, direction, and motive power to every aspect of our lives. Souls in their natural estate are corrupted by sin and focused on merely self-serving ends. This is not to say that nothing good comes from the soul of one who has not come to salvation. After all, the works of the Law are written on our hearts, and this, together with the steadfast love of God, exerts a powerful influence on the minds and consciences of every person.

Salvation is that condition of blessedness which many have come to know through faith in Jesus Christ. By salvation we enter the promises of God’s covenant, and begin the glorious adventure of growing into Jesus Christ day by day. The knowledge of what Jesus has done for us – how, by His life, death, and resurrection He has overcome the power and effects of sin – is revealed to us in the Word of God, the Scriptures. As we embrace what God reveals, we receive the precious gift of salvation, which is to know God, and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent.

But for our soul to come to salvation requires an operation of God’s Spirit, by which He *implants*, to use James’ term, the Word of God into our souls; thus, the Word and Spirit together bring life where previously only spiritual death had obtained (Jn. 6.63; Eph. 2.1-9).

Only God’s Word

How is this possible? How can a word of any kind accomplish such dramatic, comprehensive, transformative, and lasting effects on the unseen and spiritual aspects of a person’s life? Only because this is no ordinary word; it is the very Word of God.

The Bible, with which we are all familiar, goes by various names within its own pages: the Word of God, the Law of God, the sacred writings, the Scriptures, the oracles of God, and the mouth of God are just a few. All these terms intend the same referent – the words, paragraphs, chapters, and books which comprise what we know as the Bible, the Holy Scriptures.

The Word of God in the Gospel – which is the theme of all Scripture – is able to save our souls precisely because it is the Word of God, living, powerful, able to penetrate to the unseen depths of our being, and to unleash holy spiritual power according to the saving purpose of God.

We cannot talk ourselves out of sin into forgiveness and eternal life, and no amount of coaxing, cajoling, or threatening on the part of others can accomplish this conversion, either.

We need a work of God to save us, and that work comes in the form of His preached Word, wielded by His Holy Spirit, which enlightens our mind, refurbishes our heart, reorients our conscience, and plants itself firmly in our soul. With a kind of holy spiritual violence (Matt. 11.12), the Spirit of God wields the Word of God to transform our thinking, kindle new and holy affections, and shake-up our priorities according to the

Kingdom agenda of our Lord.

As a result, as the Word of God thus begins to dwell in us richly, we are saved, and enter a new phase and condition of life – eternal life, a relationship with God through Jesus Christ which makes all things new, beginning with our soul.

The Word of God is able to save our souls, and doing so, to renew and transform every aspect of our lives.

Living and powerful

The writer of Hebrews explained that the Word of God is living and active, and able to penetrate to the very depths of our being and perform spiritual surgery on our souls (Heb. 4.12), as we have seen. We do not know precisely how this occurs, but those who have experienced spiritual surgery understand exactly what it means to have the living Word of God implanted in their souls. Over the centuries, multiplied millions of people have borne testimony to the reality of this experience and of the power of this Word, which can only be a power from God.

This Word, implanted in our souls, is breathed into us by God as surely as it was first breathed into print through the prophetic and apostolic authors God chose to use as His faithful scribes.

The Word of God, the Bible, is, in many respects, a lot like many other books. But in this one most important way, it is altogether unique: It is the life-giving, soul-transforming power of God for salvation.

For reflection

1. In what ways have you experienced the indwelling power of the living Word of God?
2. Briefly describe your present practice of letting the Word of God become more deeply “planted” in your soul:
3. Are there any areas of your approach to reading and studying Scripture in which you would like to see improvement?

Next steps – Conversation: How can we know whether the Word of God has truly planted the seed of the Gospel in our souls? How should this affect our thinking and outlook on life? Our attitudes, feelings, and hopes? Our values and priorities? Talk with some Christian friends about these questions.

2 The Preeminence of the Word

*The words of the LORD are pure words,
Like silver tried in a furnace of earth,
Purified seven times. Psalm 12.6*

No taste for truth

It is a fundamental mistake on the part of Christians in our day *not* to find in the implanted Word of God all the fullness of salvation their souls may desire. When we look anywhere other than the promises of God, fulfilled in Jesus Christ – whether in wealth or relationships or politics – we will invariably be disappointed. Only when the Word of God has *preeminence* in our lives will we know the promised joy and rejoicing of the Lord, come what may.

In Psalm 12, David lamented the social and cultural situation in his day, when godliness was on the decline and lies, flattery, and deception were increasingly the norm. Neighbor-love had been supplanted by self-love, and people insisted they had a right to say or do pretty much whatever they wanted.

He might as well have been writing about our own day.

The Apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 1 that people who will not acknowledge God and serve Him with grateful hearts will turn instead to “the Lie.” “The Lie,” as Paul explained, arises when people deny the authority of God, reserving the right to choose their own loyalties and lifestyle. They firmly believe they are doing what is right and true for them; however, in the eyes of God, they have turned a deaf ear to the wooing voice of truth, and have become ensnared in the Lie of unbelief.

People embrace the Lie because the truth of God strikes them as confining; they aren’t willing to be bridled when it comes to their personal preferences, but want to have free rein to do whatever their sinful hearts might wish.

The problem, of course, is that such unbridled living tends to generate all kinds of unhappiness in society, for the redress of which people look to politics, but always to no avail.

Even Christians can be led to believe that politics and government are the solution to the evils of the Lie. If we can just get the right people in office or the right justices on the Court, then everything will begin to settle down and the progress of evil can be checked.

So how’s that been working out for us over the past generation?

The place of safety

David explained that only one thing can deliver us from the ravages of the Lie: the truth of God, which He has given us in His Word. The truth of God, revealed in Scripture, is the refuge and rock where our souls can realize the salvation God intends for us.

In Psalm 12, God determined to rise up against the Lie on behalf of all those who had been harmed by it. His weapon of choice in vanquishing the Lie was not politics, but His Word (vv. 5, 6). The only *safety* people may hope to know from the ravages of the Lie is to be found by clinging to the truth of God, revealed in Scripture.

Whereas the Lie, in all its forms, is riddled with cancerous distortions and corruptions of truth, the Word of God is pure, “*Like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.*” God gives us the pure and simple

truth, which can set us free from the power of sin and lead us into the path of blessedness and peace, joy and rejoicing.

God keeps His Word

David happily declared that God will keep His Word (v. 7). He will not back down from His truth or from doling out the consequences of its rejection to those who think they know better than He where the path of happiness lies. The ills and troubles presently plaguing our society are all the consequence of the Lie, and you can see them concisely outlined in Romans 1.18-32. All those who look to the implanted Word, trusting in what God has revealed as the way of truth, will find that His truth guards and keeps them from the consequences of the Lie, even though the Lie may continue to hold many in its thrall (Ps. 12.7, 8).

David noted that the wicked will continue to prowl about, exalting vileness by every means. But sooner or later they, too, will come up against the truth of God. Like a two-edged sword, the truth which carves the way to blessings for those who obey it will break in pieces all those who resist or oppose it (cf. Rev. 19.11-16).

The hope of every generation is to be found only in the truth of God, revealed in His Word, in having that Word so firmly planted in their souls that salvation and all its joy and rejoicing become their defining motif in life. We look in vain for political solutions to our society's ills, unless those solutions are grounded in the truth of God, which we learn from Scripture.

Scripture, not politics, must have the place of preeminence in showing us the way to righteousness, peace, and joy and rejoicing in the Lord.

For reflection

1. Meditate on Romans 1.18-32. What does Paul mean by "the Lie"? What forms does the Lie take in our day?
2. Why is politics an inefficient and ineffective measure for trying to redress the damage done by the Lie?
3. We need politics, of course; government is a gift of God (Rom. 13.1-4). But how can you see that politics and government can easily become servants of the Lie rather than of God?

Next steps – Conversation: Read Psalm 12 in its entirety. How can you see that this psalm offers a helpful commentary on our own times? Talk with some Christian friends about this. Consider how you might help one another to find the "safety" God intends for us in the pure truth of God's Word.

3 The Purpose of the Word

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. James 1.21

Never smart enough

Simply put, people would like to live forever. Nobody wants to die, and if we could figure out a way to avoid that inevitability, we surely would.

It has always been thus. Even in the Garden of Eden our first parents wanted to live forever. They wanted to be wise, like God; to have dominion over all the creatures in the Garden, just like God; to be free and happy and totally in charge of their lives, like God.

The problem Adam and Eve encountered was twofold: First, they wanted to be like God, and that's not an unholy aspiration (1 Jn. 3.1-3). But Adam and Eve were not content to be *like* God; they wanted to *be* God, having absolute and sovereign authority to live their lives as they saw fit.

Then, second, being creatures and *not* God, they discovered they weren't smart enough to figure out on their own how to live forever. Their desire to *be* God plunged them into the Lie, and left them flailing against ever-encroaching death all their days. Wanting above all else to live forever, they trusted their own inclinations above the revealed Word of God, and forfeited joy and rejoicing for sin, struggle, strife, and death.

Alas, things haven't changed much since then.

God's Word for salvation

From the beginning, God understood this. So, having created Adam and Eve, intending them to live forever, He *spoke to them* and explained what they needed to do to achieve that condition which both they and He desired. God's first words to Adam and Eve concerning what to eat and what not to eat were words designed to save them from death.

And all the Word of God is just the same.

As we have seen, the Apostle James explained that the Word of God is able to save our souls. Politics, things, relationships with other human beings – none of these can accomplish that amazing feat. In our natural condition, before hearing the Word of God, people are dead in their trespasses and sins, as Paul explained in Ephesians 2.1-3. But when we hear with understanding and faith the Word of God in the Gospel – our soul being enlivened by the Spirit of God – then we are saved from that condition of death and born again into eternal life with God. The indwelling Spirit of God then uses the implanted Word of God to transform us into the renewed image of God, opening to us throughout the process a life of joy and rejoicing.

All the rest of our lives is an adventure of growing in the salvation God has freely given us in Jesus Christ, increasing day by day in the promises, blessings, and advantages of knowing and serving Him according to His Word. As God's Word becomes more deeply planted in our souls – enlightening our minds, transforming our affections, and aligning our wills with His – we experience more and more power to resist the devil, reject the allure of sin and the Lie, and overcome its power in our daily lives. And we know more of His joy and rejoicing in every aspect of our lives.

How to get there

But this increasing salvation from the power of sin doesn't just happen. God's purpose in giving us His Word

is so that we might grow in the gift of salvation. But we have to “work out” our own salvation in fear and trembling before the Lord (Phil. 2.12, 13), turning to His Word to show us our sin (Rom. 7.7) and guide us in the footsteps of Jesus along the path of Kingdom greatness (1 Jn. .:1-6; Matt. 5.17-19). This is why reading, meditating on, and studying the Bible must become anchor disciplines of our lives.

Before this can happen, however, we have to rid ourselves of remaining vestiges of the Lie and its attendant lifestyle. Repentance, as we have seen, is a first fruit of feeding on the Word of God. James says the Word of God will only become implanted in our souls as we “lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness.”

So a twofold process is required for God’s Word to fulfill its purpose and do its work in our lives: We must turn away from all sin, whatever God makes known to us as contrary to His Word and will; and we must take up the Word of God – reading, meditating, studying, and so forth – in order to plant it deeply and firmly in our soul.

As we do this, we align with God’s purpose in giving us His Word, and we will discover more and more the power of that Word to accomplish its saving work in our souls.

For reflection

1. What’s the difference between working *out* our salvation and working *for* it? How can we know when we’ve got this right?
2. Review James 1.21: Explain the twofold process by which the Word becomes firmly and deeply implanted in our souls.
3. What do you think are the primary obstacles keeping Christians from a more vital and consistent involvement with the Word of God?

Next steps – Preparation: How would you describe the work of God’s Word in your soul? Are you experiencing more of the salvation God has given you? Spend some extended time in prayer reflecting on these questions.

4 The Pedigree of the Word

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son... Hebrews 1.1, 2

Why should we bother?

It begins to be clear that having the Word of God become implanted in our souls, so that we might know more of its power to unpack the Lord's salvation in our lives, is not like a picnic in the park. We're going to have to work at this, both at being willing to lay aside the lifestyle of the Lie, and at applying ourselves daily to reading and learning the Word of God.

But why should we bother? Can we really count on the Bible to open the way of life to us? Do joy and rejoicing *really* await us, as we overcome the famine of truth in which we have lived, and feed daily on the Word of God? Or is the Bible just there for us when we need it – a guide to doctrine, a source of counsel or comfort, or a compendium of moral instruction to help us keep our noses clean before the Lord?

Is the Bible more than this? And how did we get the Bible, anyway?

Let's look more closely at that last question: How did we *get* the Bible? How has this Book, which is able to save your soul, come to us in the first place?

God's book given through faithful men

Most of us know that the Bible claims to be the Word of God, as we have seen throughout this series. But all the words which God spoke or gave were written down in the Bible by men. Beginning with Moses, who compiled or wrote the first five books of the Bible, and various spokesmen of God called prophets – some whose names we know, others not – the entire Old Testament came into being over a period of some 1200 years. It was written in two different languages – Hebrew and Aramaic – and on two continents (Asia and Africa), by a wide range of authors.

But all those authors were uniquely chosen and empowered by God, and were carried along in their writing by the Spirit of God, as Peter explained (2 Pet. 1.21), so that the words they recorded in the various books of the Old Testament came directly from God; told a single story, following consistent threads and themes; and have been regarded as the Word of God by all who read them with faith. Even before the coming of Christ the Old Testament was already revered as the "oracles" of God, His very Word (Rom. 3.1, 2).

The New Testament was written by those who knew the Lord Jesus personally, or who were closely associated with those who did. From early on in church history their writings were recognized as being in line with and fulfilling the promises and prophecies of Moses and the prophets, and consistent with the teaching of Jesus Christ. In addition, like the books of the Old Testament, New Testament writers made claims about their works indicating they were given by the inspiration of God (cf. 2 Tim. 3.15-17; 2 Pt. 3.15; 1 Jn. 4.6).

Over several generations following the death of the Apostles, other writings began to circulate, claiming some authority related to Christ and the Gospel. Some of these writings were not very reliable, when compared with the teaching of Scripture and the growing understanding of the Church; and it soon became necessary to sort out which writings could be relied upon and which could not. For this to be done, however, Church leaders first had to determine which books were of *final* authority in evaluating other books and teachings and in guiding believers into the life of faith.

Which books, that is, were Scripture.

Able to Save

As it turned out, by the end of the second century, churches in leading ecclesiastical cities and regions had already begun to recognize the hand of God and the voice of Jesus Christ in certain writings. Collections of apostolic writings had been gathered in various places throughout the Roman world, and these collections, compared and discussed, were found to include, with a few exceptions, the same books. These books came to be acknowledged as the authoritative books of Scripture, the Word of God, the Bible.

It is evidence of the preserving and illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, working in churches throughout the Roman Empire, that this canon of books came to be recognized as the Word of God. Church leaders used these books to evaluate the claims and teachings not only of other similar books, but of all theological writing, preaching and teaching. The 66 books of the Old and New Testament thus *demonstrated* in a convincing way their divine provenance and pedigree, and have continued to do so to the present.

For 2,000 years the Church has stood on this *canon* of Scripture and, in so doing, has been the greatest force for good human history has ever known.

A reliable Word

We can trust the Scriptures when they claim to be the Word of God. Though He gave them through the auspices of prophets, shepherds, kings, and even a tax-collector, this Word has proven reliable in its power to become implanted in human souls, bringing joy and rejoicing, righteousness and hope, and transforming power in ways that bring the reality of Christ's resurrection life into everyday situations.

The Word of God, given through men, can be trusted. But we must daily *receive* and *read* the Word, planting it over and over, deeper and deeper in our souls, before it can do its saving work in our lives.

For reflection

1. Do unbelievers think the Word of God can be trusted? Why or why not?
2. What evidence would you cite to back up the claim that the Bible has been a source of great good throughout human history?
3. What's the difference between the Church "recognizing" the canon of Scripture, and the Church "determining" the canon of Scripture?

Next steps – Conversation: Meditate on John 5.39 and 6.63. Jesus insisted that the Scriptures – in His day, the Old Testament – were all about Him. How can you see that this is true, both of the Old Testament and the New? Talk about this question with some Christian friends.

5 The Perfections of the Word

The law of the LORD is perfect... Psalm 19.7

One book, many features

The Bible is the spiritual food we need to overcome the famine of truth besetting our world. The Bible is one Book, and it tells one story of God's covenant, and how all His promises of joy and rejoicing are realized through our Lord Jesus Christ. As we receive this Word and read and study it daily, it becomes implanted in our soul, and brings us ever more completely into the salvation of God.

We have been making the point that the Bible is the Word of God. It is *His* book, given to deliver us from the Lie – which we're all too willing to embrace much of the time – so that we might know the salvation and life He has planned for us.

But we also said this Word was written and compiled over a very long time by a wide variety of authors. We might expect, therefore, that the Bible would look very different from place to place within its pages. This is exactly what we find. Here is a large section of legal documents; here a collection of poems and pithy sayings; there's a bit of drama; here a historical narrative; there some biography; here, letters; and over here, mysterious "apocalyptic" writings and prophecies of various kinds.

Despite its many literary differences, and the great variety of themes it discovers, the Bible shows itself, by its many perfections, to be one single Book, the work of one all-wise and all-knowing Author.

Arguments for divine authorship

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* is, as we have seen, a venerable declaration of the essential tenets of Christian doctrine, first published in 1648. In its opening chapter, it summarizes "arguments" which can be mustered, pointing to the various perfections of Scripture, as evidence of the Bible's being the very Word of God. Here's how the writers put it: "We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture." That addresses the topic we considered yesterday, the Church's acknowledgement and use of the Scriptures from the beginning. The *Confession* continues: "And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God..."

Whew! That's a mouthful. No wonder the Bible is "able to save your souls"! But I want us at least to glimpse each of the various "perfections" mentioned here, so that we can see for ourselves something of the abundant evidence of divine authorship of the Word of God. No book in all of literary history can match the majesty and variety of the perfections which we routinely encounter in the Bible.

The evidence

To repeat then:

"the heavenliness of the matter" – the Bible keeps us focused above, striving toward heavenly perfection and joy, even while it teaches us how to live here and now. Its objective is to lift readers toward God, holiness, and joy and rejoicing.

"the efficacy of the doctrine" – the teaching of Scripture is congruent with reality and brings genuine benefit to all who follow it. The doctrines unpacked through reading and studying the Bible explain the human situation, and the situation of the world, better than any other source.

“the majesty of the style” – only God could bring such beauty and transcendence into all those various books, themes, and genre. There is nothing merely vulgar about the Bible; everything about how it is written tends to ennoble, rather than to debase.

“the consent of all the parts” – the Bible is in agreement with itself throughout about the things that matter most and the good and perfect will of God. We often hear objections concerning the contradictions of Scripture. Such as are pointed out can usually be easily reconciled.

“the scope of the whole” – all Scripture calls us to glorify God in all aspects of life. The whole Bible carries this theme forward from beginning to end.

“the full discovery it makes of the way of salvation” – the Bible is all about Jesus Christ and the saving mercy and power of God, from cover to cover.

“many other incomparable excellencies” – the Bible is exciting to read; it implants itself in us and transforms us from within; it helps us to understand why things are the way they are, and how they can be made better; it makes all things new!

“the entire perfection thereof” – which perhaps explains why, every year, more Bibles are printed, sold, and distributed than all other books combined.

The Bible argues its own case for being the Word of God. But the truth of this claim doesn't just depend on its “arguments” and “perfections.” The Word of God is *powerful*, and this is its greatest witness to its divine provenance and pedigree, and to its promise to bring joy and rejoicing to our soul.

For reflection

1. What do unbelievers cite as “contradictions” in the Bible? How should we respond to these claims?
2. Which of the Bible's many perfections have particularly affected you during your time in the Word? Why?
3. If you had to summarize the “story line” of the Bible in a sentence or two, what would you say?

Next steps – Conversation: What else would you include in the list of the Bible's “perfections”? How have you experienced the “perfections” of the Bible, and what difference do these make in your appreciation and use of it? Talk with a Christian friend about these questions.

6 The Power of the Word

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes... Romans 1.16

No ordinary Book

When Paul wrote that the Gospel is the “power of God for salvation,” he was not just talking about the Good News that Jesus has risen from the dead. He might just as well have said that the *Scriptures* are the power of God for salvation, since, as we have seen, the central message and focus of the entire Bible is the story of Jesus Christ and way of redemption and salvation God has accomplished through Him.

The Bible is *power* – the power *of God* – which results in salvation, and joy and rejoicing without ceasing.

The Bible is thus no ordinary book. It is the Word of God, and it has power to open minds, recalibrate hearts, and retool consciences and wills, so that people believe its teaching, and begin to be made altogether new in Jesus. Nothing compares with the Bible’s power to make us new. Because it is the very Word of God, it knows us, becomes implanted in our souls, and, working with the Spirit of God, accomplishes results we could never achieve without the power of the Word working in us.

What kind of power?

But what kind of power is this which the Word of God wields? And how does it wield it?

There are, of course, many kinds of power at work in the world. Power is simply one form or another of energy directed at the end of accomplishing some work. Electrical power turns on our lights. Gas power cooks our meals and runs our cars. The power of wind and rain grows our gardens, and so forth.

The power of the Word of God is *spiritual* power. That is, it works at the most fundamental level of human existence. The world may scoff at the idea of spiritual anything, but this only demonstrates the degree to which it has been blinded by spiritual forces of wickedness in high places. Believers, awakened by the Word and Spirit of God to the larger realities of the world – the unseen realities of Christ and the Spirit – know full well that spiritual power is the most important kind of power to possess.

And the Bible possesses it in spades.

That power becomes effective in our lives as the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to accomplish real transformations in how we think, feel, and will. The power thus generated in our soul releases energy for good works and good words, as we become increasingly transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the operative power of the Word of God, without Whose interventions and operations we will never be able to know the power of the Word for salvation. As we position ourselves before the Word of God – whether reading or hearing it, ready to receive and obey it – the Spirit takes that Word and applies it to the spiritual core of our lives. If we are truly listening, and willing to be taught, and if we can face up to areas of our lives where we need to repent of sin and cling more closely to God, then the Spirit will implant that Word in new ways, release His power and generate new spiritual energy, and further His work of making all things new in our lives.

The impact of its power

But how do we *experience* the power of the Word of God? That is, how can we know when *that* power is energetically at work in our lives? In various ways.

First, by the power of the Word the Spirit *confirms the teaching of Scripture* to our souls, and we become, and remain, persuaded that Christ is real, God is real, salvation is real, and that, praise God, we have it. The Spirit

works continuously with the Word of God to unleash spiritual power in our souls, *assuring* us that we have been forgiven, we belong to God, He is making all things new in our lives, and we will dwell with Him forever.

Imagine if we had to fight that battle every single day! Instead, each time we sit down with the Word of God, the Spirit reminds us in our soul, that we're right where we ought to be, children of our heavenly Father, feeding on the spiritual nourishment He provides for us in His Word.

Further, the power of the Word works to bring to light any sins which we have committed or which linger in our soul (Ps. 139.23, 24; Jn. 16.8-11). At times, when we're reading the Word, we should experience a very uncomfortable sense of "Uh oh." At the same time, the Spirit will use the Word powerfully to convince and direct us in the way things *should* be in our lives, to illuminate a path that runs through the pleasure and will of God to the newness of life God intends for us. So that the power of the Word to *convict* is also a power to *persuade* and to *enable us* to think differently, love more appropriately, and will according to the will of God.

That power then becomes *operational* in our daily lives so that we are able to do the good works for which we have been redeemed, and for which the Word and Spirit of God equip us day by day (Eph. 2.10; 2 Tim. 3.15-17).

The power of the Word is the power of God for salvation. It is a true spiritual power that works, the more we subject ourselves to it, to make all things new in our lives, and to bring us ever more firmly and consistently into the joy and rejoicing of the Lord.

For reflection

1. In what ways do you experience the spiritual power of the Word of God?
2. Suppose someone were to tell you this is all just a psychological thing; there are no spiritual powers. How would you respond?
3. What do we mean by the "soul"? What is your responsibility with respect to your soul, and how does the Word of God fit in to this?

Next steps – Conversation: What are some ways you have recently experienced the power of God's Word working on your mind, heart, or conscience? Share your observations with a Christian friend.

7 The Point of the Word

“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.” John 5.39

It’s about Jesus

The point of Scripture, the Word of God, is Jesus Christ. Simply put, period. Wherever you’re reading in the Bible, whatever doctrine you may be focusing on, book you may be pondering, example you may be sorting through, or topic you may be studying, if Jesus Christ is not the center of it, you may be in danger of missing the point of God’s Word.

And if you miss the point of God’s Word, you may easily veer of the path of joy and rejoicing into one of self-righteousness, spiritual smugness, intellectual vapidness, or mere spiritual indifference. Only Jesus is Life (Jn. 14.6); only in His presence can we know fullness of joy and pleasures forever more (Ps. 16.11). Miss Jesus, and you’ve missed the Scriptures altogether.

Don’t get me wrong; the Bible contains many interesting and important topics besides Jesus Christ. There are promises to claim, prophecies in some stage of fulfillment, stories to guide our conduct, doctrines to inform our faith, and much more.

But central to all these, and the only hope we have of benefiting from any of them, is Jesus Christ. All of Scripture is like a spiritual Rorschach Test. Everywhere you turn, whatever you’re reading, studying, or hearing, the final answer is, “Jesus Christ.”

He said so Himself

Now, granted, it may be difficult to *see* Jesus Christ in all of Scripture. Certainly it’s easier to see Him in some places than in others. It’s easier to see Jesus in the Gospels, for example, than in the book of Ecclesiastes. But He’s the theme of Ecclesiastes nonetheless. At the end of that strange, wonderful book of meditations and advice, Solomon writes, “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccl. 12.15 ESV). Great. But how are we supposed to do that? Only through Jesus Christ. He teaches us to fear God as we should, and to love Him at the same time. He has fulfilled all the Law and the Prophets. And He, by His resurrection from the dead, grants us new life in Him, in which fearing God and keeping His commandments are empowered in us by His Word and Spirit.

It may be easier to see Jesus when we’re reading about the sacrifices in ancient Israel than, let’s say, when we’re plodding through those genealogies in Genesis or 1 Chronicles. But the genealogies given in Scripture are intended to remind us that the events of God’s deliverance were carried out with real people in real history, and that history was moving toward a fullness of times in which Jesus came to earth bringing salvation and the Kingdom of God. And the story of Jesus and the redemption He came to provide begins with two separate statements of His own lineage as the Son of God and a true child of Adam (Matt. 1; Lk. 3).

Jesus declared that, wherever you read, meditate, or study in the Scriptures, your searching will not be complete until you have come to Him and some aspect of His redemptive work. All the promises of Scripture find their fulfillment in Jesus (2 Cor. 1.20). Jesus fulfills all the Law of God (Matt. 5.17-19). He is the centerpiece of every prophecy and all the historical narratives of Israel’s attempts to be pleasing to God.

When you read Scripture, let the prayer of those ancient Greeks be always yours as well: “Lord, I want to see Jesus!” (Jn. 12.20, 21)

Glory to glory

Jesus is to the Scriptures like the hidden image in one of those Magic Eye pictures. On the surface you can

Able to Save

recognize some familiar images – interconnecting flying birds, for example, or threads in a tapestry, or looping bubbles and swirls. These are interesting and fun, but they aren't the whole story. Embedded within them is three-D image which, if you concentrate long enough, and stay focused, will gradually emerge with great clarity and surprise.

Looking for Jesus in Scripture is like this. He's there, and you won't "get" what your passage intends unless you wait, concentrate, look, and wait some more, until the Spirit of God leads you through the surface meaning of your passage into the deeper reality of Jesus Christ Who dwells in it. Then, when you see Him there, you can draw close and embrace Him as He reveals Himself in that passage, and enter more fully into the joy and rejoicing He has for you there.

When you approach Scripture in this way, the Spirit of God will escort you into the very presence of Christ and His glory, showing you, in every section of the Word, some new insight about Jesus and how He can make all things new in your life. In the presence of the glory of Christ, you will feel the power of the Word working out the salvation of God in your soul, and transforming you into the image of Him you meet there. Then you can go forth from that encounter with Jesus, made just a bit more like Him, to refract His glory in all the places and with all the people in your life (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31).

Why can the Bible do this? Because it is alive and powerful and *able* to bring God's salvation to your soul.

The point of Scripture is Jesus Christ and His redemption. When you read Scripture, read it to get the point, and you'll truly begin to know the Bible as the Word which is able to save your soul.

For reflection

1. The Old Testament looks forward to Jesus. How many different ways can you see that?
2. The New Testament looks back to Jesus and forward to Him as well. How can you see that?
3. How have you encountered Jesus during your time of Bible reading, meditation, or study this week?

Next steps – Transformation: How have you been able to "see Jesus" in your reading of the Word lately? Share your thoughts about this with a Christian friend, and ask your friend to share with you as well. How can you encourage one another to see Jesus more consistently in all your reading and study of the Bible?

Able to Save

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What do we mean by saying that the Scriptures are able to save your soul?
2. How do the Scriptures do this? What kind of power is exerted in your soul, and how does this affect your thinking, feeling, and priorities?
3. What should we expect as the power of the Spirit unleashes transforming energy in our soul? How should that come to light in your life?
4. Why is the Word of God the only reliable antidote to the various forms of the Lie of unbelief?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you working to implement that lesson in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.