

Believing the Bible

Our Family Values:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

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There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.
(Proverbs 14:12, NIV)

(Video Clip: http://www.7rendered.com/life/march/MARCH_sin.html) Last night, Rochester's John Marshall High School held its Prom. Proms can be joyful and healthy events, but too often they are marred by tragedy. One of my doctor friends does autopsies at the Mayo Clinic. He reports that every spring he deals with an influx of youth from accidents in this region. This video by a youth group in Owatonna reminds us not merely of the danger of drinking and driving, but of the nature of sin. It destroys. It disappoints. It defiles. It dictates. It deceives. Most of us adults see the foolhardy actions of the youth, but do we see the harm we do? Truthfully, everyone is sin-infested. Our thinking and our subsequent actions destroy what God has made, disappoint all of us, defile what is holy, dictate our lives and leave us in deception. It is impossible for us to live healthy lives, pleasing to God, because of the way we think.

All of us know times when our thinking caused problems. We missed questions on a test. We caused a car accident. Sometimes, those are fender-benders. Sometimes the result is much worse. The question, "What were you thinking?" occurs in skilled practices. Each year medication errors in American clinics, hospitals and nursing homes kill 7,000 people and injure 1.5 million. Treatment of those injuries cost an additional 3.5 billion dollars. We may attribute this to human frailty, but isn't that blaming our creator? Did God create us so that we kill one

another? Or is all of this a sign that we are disconnected from the thoughts of our creator? I'm not claiming that if we are walking with God as individuals, we don't make errors. I do observe that as people (or societies), families and individuals who sin we suffer lapses in judgment that create all kinds of suffering and pain.

The Apostle Paul understood that Scriptures carry the thoughts and ideas God wants people to know. God scripted things for us to read so that we would recognize his visitation and welcome him. Paul wrote his young companion Timothy:

Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:14-15, NIV)

Paul told Timothy that the Scriptures are able to make him wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. In Jesus' time and following, a lot of people read the Scriptures and missed God's visitation. They were not wise about salvation. Until Paul's dramatic encounter with the Spirit of Jesus during his journey to Damascus, Paul as a scholar misunderstood the Bible and lived estranged from God. Only when Paul encountered Jesus did he begin to understand the saving work God spoke of and prophesied in Scriptures.

Jesus is the living Word of God. The scripted Word of God reveals God in action on occasion. However, the living Word of God reveals God absolutely. Jesus is with us in Spirit to guide us into all truth and bring to mind what we need. Jesus opens our minds to understand the Scriptures, the nature of the world and the will of our Creator. Through faith in Jesus the Scriptures open us to liberating power and the amazing will of God. The Scriptures as a sword in the hand of God's Spirit cut through deception and make us wise to embrace the restoration God desires for us as his children. Consequently, Paul writes Timothy:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NASU)

The term *inspired* means that *God breathed* these words into existence for our benefit. Notice that all Scriptures, not just the parts with which we feel comfortable, are beneficial for teaching, reproof, correction and training.

If we believe in Jesus, why would we need reproof or correction? We've grown up in a world estranged from God. Many of our attitudes and actions are poisoned by ignorance and deception. The Scriptures with Jesus' leadership open our eyes and our hearts. Consequently, to experience the fullness of salvation, to be freed from the traps of sin, we need to read the Bible with the help of Jesus. Listen to this call from God:

Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. You must warn each other every day, while it is still "today," so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. (Hebrews 3:12-13, NLT)

God calls us into a fellowship where we help one another through faith in Jesus to experience teaching, reproof, correction and training through the Scriptures. Consequently, we embrace the following as a critical value and core activity for our fellowship. Read it with me:

Believing the Bible: We value the Bible as God's authoritative Word, study it together, and build our lives on its truth. (2Timothy 3:16-17)

I know it is important to read the Bible individually. Despite my thirst to know the Scriptures, I had trouble making that a daily habit for years. Tired of the on-again-off-again nature of my private Bible reading, I made a pledge. *No read, no feed.* I wouldn't eat breakfast, lunch or dinner until I read what I desired from the Bible. You can tell I haven't missed too many meals. It wasn't long before reading the Bible privately was such an established habit that I didn't need that strict rule in my life. In fact, on rare occasion when I come to the end of the

day without spending time in God's Word, I feel incomplete until I open the pages of Scripture, talk with God about it, and begin hearing his words for me.

Although I'm convinced that it is important for each of us to read the Bible individually, we need to study it together and build our lives on its truth. Jesus opens our minds and hearts as we gather to study and obey what God says through Scripture. When Bible scholars of Jesus' time thought they came up with a fool proof logic to disprove the resurrection of the dead, Jesus told them that they were in error precisely because (1) they didn't know the Scriptures that well and (2) they didn't know the power of God.

We not only need to study what is scripted for us. We also need to hear what God is doing when people act on these Scriptures in faith. When you gather with people and hear what they've done, it increases your faith. When people tell you stories of answered prayer, amazing provision, instantaneous healing in the name of Jesus, you become familiar with the power of God. It changes how you read the Bible and what you attempt to do. We do live in error because we don't know the Scriptures and don't understand the power of God at work today. However, we don't have to live in error and in ignorance of such love and power.

Are you personally interacting with a group of people who are building their lives on the truth of God's Word? Who warns you each day? Who confronts you each day? Who does God use to change your unbelieving, evil heart into one that is full of forgiveness, faith and love? Who is helping you escape the traps of the devil?

Call out to Jesus right now. Ask him to lead you into fellowship and study of the Scriptures. Pray over the invitations you receive to small groups and Bible studies. There will be many. Don't back away in unbelief. Jesus promised that wherever two or three are gathered in his name, he is not only present in their midst. He will guide you into the fullness of salvation.

You will not end up like the foolhardy teenager who walked a path of injury and death. You will be a life-giver. That is God's will for you.