

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost - Rally Day

Lessons for the Day: Isaiah 35:4-7a; James 2:1-10, 14-18; Mark 7:31-37

*Real Men (and Women and Children) Read Instructions!*

September 9, 2018

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

It is a scene I am sure is familiar in quite a few homes. Several times in the past few months, I started to put together some furniture from Ikea—a couch and some book cases that we had bought. I was laying things out and looking them over when my dear wife looked at me and said, “Wouldn’t it be easier if you read the instructions first?” In point of fact, I had read the instructions. When it comes to building or assembling things, I do follow the instructions—great handyman that I am. On the other hand, my wife does know that there are certain things I will jump into with both feet: I don’t need instructions to hook up a DVD player (although, with the myriad of cables and accessories today, I do find it helpful to take a peak at them once in a while). I don’t typically look for instructions with computer equipment or software. I do look at maps before travelling, to make sure I know where I’m going—unless, of course, I tell myself that I know where I’m going. Then I could be miles off course or headed in the wrong direction, but, stubborn man that I am, I don’t bother stopping to ask for directions.

It has become one of those stereotypes that so often have just a bit of truth behind them: real men don’t ask for directions. Real men don’t read instructions. But, like all stereotypes, this is also an overstatement. Many men do read instructions. They do recognize the need for wisdom and guidance outside of themselves. They know they can’t do it alone, but they do want to do it right.

On this Christian Education Sunday, Paul reminds once again of our need to *continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it*. In the pages of Holy Scripture God Himself is speaking to us, leading us, teaching us, guiding us, correcting us. He speaks to us so that we might know Him and His love and grace for us in Christ. He speaks to us so that we may know how to live in this troubled and confused world. He speaks to us so that we may have life with Him forever in the glory of His eternal kingdom. This is the one book, the one source of information, that provides the answers that people so often seek in life. And real men—and women—and children—should read these instructions, that we may be *wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*

*“The B-I-B-L-E! Yes, that’s the book for me. I stand alone on the Word of God: the B-I-B-L-E!”* Those words of one of the songs we sing with the children in our Sunday School remind us of the importance of God’s Word for our lives. In 1983, then US president Ronald Reagan declared it the year of the Bible. I don’t know what Reagan’s overall goal was, but that declaration did serve to remind Christians of a truth they often forget or ignore: the Bible is important to all of life. Paul tells us that *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work*. In these sacred pages, we find answers for our relationships with one another. We find encouragement and direction for the right way to live—something we definitely need, since we make the same errors and mistakes over and over again. We see through the Scriptures our need for salvation. But the central focus of God’s Word is to lead us to, and assure us of, the salvation God has accomplished for us through the dying and rising Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The Bible is not like the other ‘holy writings’ of the world. The Koran, the words of Buddha, the book of Mormon—these are all the products of human ideas and philosophies. Of course, people have often said the same thing about the Bible. In one of the attacks on the Bible in the book, *The Da Vinci Code*, one of the characters, who is supposedly an expert in ancient history and writings declares that *“the bible did not arrive by fax from heaven”*. He then adds, *“the bible is a product of man [my dear], not of God”*. People tend to think of the Bible as a good book, although that is changing, as there are those who now see the Bible as violent and hateful. But so many see only the human authors, and not the God who makes Himself known in His Word.

Paul tells us clearly in our text that *All Scripture is breathed out by God*, or inspired by God. Yes, there were human writers that God used to put the message on paper—or papyrus, if you want to be picky. And when God inspired these writers, it doesn’t

mean that God simply gave the human authors some ideas of what to write, and that they then fleshed it out. No, the Holy Spirit was at work in every word those human authors put to paper. Every word, every thought in Scripture comes from God. It is without error or contradiction. Even when science or history tells us something different, we can trust that the Bible is true—a fact that has been proven true many times over the years as our science or history has advanced to catch up with the Bible. Jesus says *Scripture cannot be broken*. (John 10:35 - ESV) He prays for all of His followers, asking the Father to *Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth*. (John 17:17 - ESV) And Paul says to the Thessalonians: *And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers*. (1 Thessalonians 2:13 - ESV)

This truth is vital, so important that let me make this clear right now: if the Bible is just another book by human authors, and it isn't the inspired Word of God Himself, then go home now. There is nothing for you here. There is nothing that I can offer you. There is no assurance of forgiveness and life in Christ. There is no hope of heaven. There is only the vain, empty, wishful thinking of the sinful human heart.

If you are thinking of leaving, I hope you'll reconsider, because no matter what an unbelieving world says, the Bible is the very Word of God. And since it is God's Word, we need to listen carefully to that Word. Real men and women and children need to *read, mark, learn and inwardly digest [or take to heart] that word*. Our Christian Education Sunday reminds us that we are to be students of the Word. We need these instructions for life. In fact, we can't truly live without them.

Sadly, that Word is often set aside in the day to day hustle and bustle of life. We will spend hours reading the false news items on the internet while ignoring the Bible. We don't worship as we should. We don't study as we should. The bible lies on the shelf or on the coffee table, often unopened. I still like that story of the family that invited the Pastor for dinner, and after the meal the father, trying to impress the Pastor, said to his son, "Go get that book we all know and love". The father was more than a little embarrassed when his son returned with the Sears Wish Book—which, for you young people, was like shopping on Amazon, but you had to do it through a catalogue.

But there is something better than the Wish Book. Paul encourages Timothy, and all of us to keep growing in this Word of Life. Timothy learned that Word from his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. Most of us first hear that Word from faithful parents, who read it and speak it to their children. We also bring them to the house of the Lord, as we gather together to listen to the Lord as He speaks to us in His Word. We gather to study the Word in Sunday School and Bible Class. We read it in our personal devotion. We focus on this Word because no matter how often we have read it or how long we have studied it, we still need the peace, the comfort, the help and the guidance that God's Word of Truth provides for us.

The Word of God brings us real, lasting, and eternal peace and hope. This Word *makes you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*. That is really what the Bible is all about—it's all about Jesus and what He has done, and does do for us. In His Word, God speaks to us of our sin and all that we have done that falls short of His glory. But He also tells us that wonderful good news of the Saviour, who came to give His holy, sinless life for helpless, lost sinners like you and me. Our God declares His love for us, as the eternal Son, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords comes to die in our place on a cross, paying the price for our sin. The Scriptures also assure us that Jesus, who died, rose again from the dead. He does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Through faith in Him, we have forgiveness greater than our sins, and a life that never ends. We have new life, here and now, and no fear of the torment of hell that we do deserve because of our sins. We read God's instruction book, and instead of trying to save ourselves, we trust what God has told us in His Word: Jesus is our Saviour. He lives, and we will live by faith in Him.

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed*. Real men, women and children need to read the instructions that God gives us in His Word. Boys and girls, I pray that you will continue to learn and study that Word in Sunday School and Confirmation classes and especially in our worship together as a church family. That same truth applies to our youth, and young adults, and our not-so-young adults. There isn't a time when we can say we've learned it all and that we don't need it any more. We need to be here regularly and faithfully as we gather in the name of the Lord to be fed on His Word. We need to read that Word and study it regularly. The psalmist says: *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers*. (Psalm 1:1-3 - ESV) Build your life on that Word, following the instructions of the Manufacturer, and you will find the blessings that He has given to you in Christ. You will find rest for your souls. You will find peace and contentment in the most difficult moments of life. And you will know the joy of life in Christ forevermore. Amen.