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## FOUNDATIONAL ISSUES:

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### The Word of God in Ministry

The most powerful tool given by God to the church to affect the lives of people are the 66 books, 1,189 chapters, 31,173 verses of the Bible. Each page of the Bible is the authoritative Word of God, containing declarations which explicitly assert God as its Author. Throughout the Bible the following statements are found: "Thus says the Lord" (419 times), "God said" (46 times), "The Word of the Lord" (276 times), "The Word of God" (53 times), "God spoke" (12 times), "My Word" (56 times), "My commandment" (28 times), "My Law" (16 times), "God's commandment" (12 times), and the "Scripture" (51 times). These 969 statements, as well as many other attestations in the Bible, should give the man of God confidence as he uses the Bible to cause the regeneration of the lost in addition to the transformation and equipping of the members of his church. As Hebrews 4:12 states, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Therefore it is totally capable of obtaining these results.



#### Its importance

The importance of the Bible is seen throughout its pages. Actually its longest chapter speaks to its importance, Psalm 119. The first six verses of this psalm open with instruction which show its importance: "How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all *their* heart. They also do no unrighteousness; they walk in His ways. You have ordained Your precepts, that we should keep *them* diligently. Oh that my ways may be established to keep Your statutes! Then I shall not be ashamed when I look upon all Your commandments." The significance of the Word of God is seen here in regards to the believer's walk. It is the means by which he may walk in accordance with God's desires. This is why the psalmist proclaims later in this psalm, "Therefore I love Your commandments above gold, yes, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem right all *Your* precepts concerning everything, I hate every false way" (vss. 127-128). Then he says, "Your word is very pure, therefore Your servant loves it" (vs. 140).

God Himself made statements about the importance of His commandments, His Law. He said, "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deut. 6:5-9). God made it clear that His Word was so important that it needed to be integrated into every part of the believer's life. It needed to be in his heart, the source of all he did in his life. It needed to be on his tongue, consequently teaching it diligently to his children throughout the day, from when they rose up until they laid down. God even said that His Word needed to be ever before his eyes, as if it were bound to his hand and forehead as a constant reminder of what God said. He was even to write the commandments of God on his doorposts and gates. God did not want Israel to forget, not even a single command of His.

The Law which God gave Moses was of such importance that God told Joshua before going in to take the land of Canaan, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success" (Josh. 1:8). God equated Joshua's success with his understanding of and constant obedience to His Word. Joshua was to think the Word of God. He was to speak the Word of God. He was to live the Word of God. Therefore if the man of God desires success in his life and ministry, he must do the same. Doing so is the key to loving the Lord his God with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might (Deut. 6:5). Why? Because his obedience to God's Word is clearly how he shows his love to God (John 14:21-24; 1 John 5:3). It is also how He abides in Christ and Christ's Word abides in him, resulting in the bearing of much fruit (John 15:4-7).

When Moses spoke to the Israelites about the Word of God, its importance is again seen: "All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord swore *to give* to your forefathers. You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord... Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him" (Deut. 8:1-3,6). Moses' point was that God did some of the things He did in the desert to humble the Israelites so that they would understand that obedience to the Word of God was of utmost importance. It was more important than the very food they ate. Consequently God kept food from them to make them hungry, feeding them manna for the purpose of showing them what was in their hearts, which many times was disobedience. Following the Word of God, walking in His ways and fearing Him are of the greatest importance to the believer. Jesus understood this for He said to His disciples when they brought Him food to eat, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work" (John 4:34).

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus stated quite emphatically the importance of the Word of God: "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the

smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Mat. 5:18-19). The "Law" of Moses Jesus said would be accomplished -- all of it -- down to "the smallest letter or stroke" (of a letter). He also made it clear that whoever annuls just one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be the least in the kingdom. In contrast, those who obey and teach them shall be great. So clearly God considers His Word exceedingly important, and so should all true believers. Jesus goes on, and as He concludes His sermon, He says: "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and *yet* it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall." (Mat. 7:24-27). The Word of God is a place of security, being a strong, sturdy foundation for those who hear and act upon it.

Lastly, the fact that "all Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16) is further evidence of the Bible's importance. As Peter said in 2 Peter 1:20-21, "no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." The word, "interpretation" in Greek (Gk., *epiloosis*) means literally unloosening or releasing. So the issue in verse 20 is not that "no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation," but that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own "revealing," or "unveiling of hidden truth." In other words, God is the revealer of prophecy, not man. This makes more sense in the context of verse 21, that "no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." In this verse Peter is stating that God is the source of prophecy, the Holy Spirit being the agent of inspiration. For it is the Holy Spirit who moved (Gk., *pheromenoi*; He bore or carried along) the writers of Scripture as the wind would a ship when it fills its sails and moves it. So in these two verses Peter is making it clear that God is both the Revealer and Source of prophecy. This being the case, the Scriptures are inspired, being the very words of God to man. Therefore the Scriptures are of utmost importance to mankind.

### **Its power**

The Bible was intentional, planned and written by God in such a way that it would speak to all of the topics which God determined were necessary for man to understand. In other words, the Bible is not a haphazard collection of writings by 40 plus authors, but is a specific collection purposely written to accomplish all that it was set out to do. God said, "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it" (Isa. 55:10-11). Therefore we can be assured that it is effectual and sufficient for the task, and it has the power to accomplish all that God desires.

Not only is God's Word effectual, but it is invasive. Hebrews 4:12 explains: "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Because the Bible is alive and has this ability to invade a person, probing deep into the spiritual core of a man, it is able to judge a man's heart. In this process the Word of God is able to accurately assess the very thoughts and determine the very intentions of what a person thinks and does. Having this capability, the Bible can force a man to look inwardly at the contents of his heart, those things which defile him (Mark 7:18-23) as well as those things which commend him (cf., Luke 6:45; 8:15; 1 Cor. 4:5). This process of invading the core of a man, causing him to look intently at his thoughts and intentions through the living and effectual Word of God, can transform him (cf. Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:23) as it cleanses (Eph. 5:25-27) and sanctifies him (John 17:17). Such a process is helpful to the Bible reader if he abides by what he reads. James makes this clear when he wrote, "But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does" (Jam. 1:25). Therefore the Word of God is powerful, being able to invade, convict and change the heart of a believer.

The Word of God is also powerful in transforming the lives of unbelievers into followers of Jesus. Peter said in 1 Peter 1:22-25: "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God. For, 'All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever.' And this is the word which was preached to you." Peter makes it clear that the reason his readers were to love one another was because they were born again (born from above), this resulting from the living and enduring Word of God which transformed them. This transformation gave them the ability to be obedient to the truth of God's Word. Consequently they were able to purify their souls, this giving them the capacity to love in this way. Peter also made it clear that where the flesh of man is perishable, those who were born again of God's imperishable Word will live forever. Thus the Word of God has the power to transform lives from the perishable to the imperishable, from the unregenerate to a transformed individual.

### **Its necessity in ministry**

One reason the Word of God is necessary for church leaders in ministry is because it reveals to us how to live and understand life from God's perspective. God said of Himself, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8-9). Understanding our personal view of life generally takes little effort, while understanding life from God's perspective can be difficult at times, uncomfortable, and stretching. It can be difficult because we have to wrestle with the deep wisdom of God, understanding it in the context of the entire Bible. It can be uncomfortable because the Word of God is always prompting us to change to become more Christlike. This will also cause us to have to change how we understand life and the Bible which can also cause discomfort. It is stretching because as it changes us, we are no longer who we used to be, slowly being molded into a new person. Yet

ultimately this process should be freeing, enlightening, and bring peace as we grow in truth, for it is the Word of God which gives clarity. As fallible human beings, we do not always understand things as God does, but the Bible helps us to see things clearly; that is if we take the time to study it, meditate upon it and ask God for understanding. Without God's Word we cannot be effective in our ministry. But with it we can penetrate the hearts of people (cf. Acts 2:37) for the Word of God is sharp and piercing, being portrayed in the Scriptures as "the sword of the Spirit." (Eph. 6:17). Ministers of the gospel need to know how to effectively yield this sword. God also describes His Word as a fire and a hammer. He said, "Is not My word like fire?" declares the Lord, 'and like a hammer which shatters a rock?' (Jer. 23:29). In other words God's Word is powerful, and it will accomplish His plan because His ways cannot be thwarted (Job 42:2). Such a tool is necessary for the man of God to battle against satanic forces (cf. Mat. 4:1-11) and to be able to impact the lives of people.

Another reason the Bible is necessary in ministry is because it is the very Word of God. As the Word of God, it is capable of preparing God's people for ministry which, according to Ephesians 4:11-16 is the primary goal of the pastor and evangelist (see the chapter titled, "Pastor's and Evangelist's Equipping Ministry"). Paul wrote, "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 Tim. 3:16-17). Therefore, the pastor and evangelist who desire to have an effective force which is capable of ministering fruitfully within the church and the community where the church is located must have members who are equipped to do the work. It is the Word of God which was given to accomplish this task. It can transform the character of a Christian, giving him the wisdom and knowledge he needs, preparing him for service, and equipping him for the work God has for him to accomplish.

Jesus -- the Word of God (John 1:1-3) -- understood the power of God's Word and its necessity in our lives. This can be seen in the fact that the night in which Jesus was taken to be tried, he prayed for all of His disciples, even for you and me (cf. John 17:20). He said, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth" (John 17:17). The word "sanctify" means to purify, to separate from, to set apart. So Jesus was asking His Father to use His truth to sanctify Jesus' disciples. It is then that Jesus explicitly equates God's Word with truth. What Jesus wanted were disciples who would reflect His character, who would be holy, and who would live righteously. Jesus knew that this could only be accomplished through the Word of God, and that is why He made this request. Knowing this, the pastor and evangelist need to understand that their Bible is God's truth. It is what God has given them to use to sanctify believers; helping them grow in faith, hope and love; in their relationship with Christ; in their knowledge of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit; in the fruit of the Spirit; etc. This is the tool they have "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). Without it they have nothing. With it they can produce mature, productive, effective disciples of Christ.

Some final reasons why the Word of God is necessary in ministry is because those who follow the Word of God will have wisdom and understanding (Psa. 111:10; 119:104,130). They will keep their way pure, and not sin against God as a result of treasuring His Word (Psalm 119:9-11). They will also have a light for their path and a lamp to their feet (Psa. 119:105) so they can see clearly the way to go. These are reasons the man of God needs to teach the Word of God to the people of God. The Apostles, understanding the importance and necessity of this ministry, gave

themselves fully to this work, wanting nothing to sidetrack them (Acts 6:4). Thus it should be for church leaders today. David wrote, "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether" (Psa. 19:7-9).

## **Conclusion**

Due to the importance of the Bible as the Word of God and because of its intrinsic power, it is vital that the church leader understand that it is his most important tool. For it has occurred that when the Bible was read from pulpits by unsaved pastors, the hearers came to faith in Christ. This is its power; consequently, it is an essential and indispensable part of the ministry of the man of God.

However, though the average church leader would agree 100% with the truths presented in this article, how often does his practice agree with his understanding? In other words, how important is the Bible in his daily life and ministry? To answer this, all one has to do is consider some of the following questions:

1. How much time does he spend reading it each day?
2. How much time does he invest each week in studying it before he preaches and teaches it?
3. How often does he carry it with him so that he has it available for potential ministry opportunities?
4. How much time does he spend memorizing it?
5. How many times has he read the entire Bible from cover to cover?
6. How well can he use the Bible in teaching, counseling, and refuting false doctrine and false teachers?
7. How much does he focus his attention on applying the Word of God to his life?

So though you may agree with the importance of, the power of, and the necessity of the Word of God in the lives of church leaders and church members, what is your reality? Remember, it was the Word of God which Paul and his companions preached, proclaiming Jesus throughout the known world, about whom the Thessalonians said, "These men who have upset the world have come here also" (Acts 17:6). You have the same authoritative Word of God at your disposal with which to use to transform people and upset the world for Jesus.

For this to happen though, we need to view the Bible as did the writers of the Bible. Job said of the words of God, "I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). A psalmist said, "I rise before dawn and cry for help; I wait for Thy words. My eyes anticipate the night watches, that I may meditate on Thy word" (Psa. 119:147-148). If the Word of God is as important to us as it was to these men, if we understand its power and its necessity in our ministry, if we honor it through reading it daily, through our diligent study and our memorization of it, if we apply it to our lives and use it to see others transformed, then we will take it seriously and as a consequence see great results as God works through it.

The minister of the gospel needs to remember this so as not to fall prey to the plague that is ravaging portions of the church of Jesus Christ where biblically based sermons are being replaced by talks about Bible truth, or a focus on stories, personal experience, dramas, etc. The preacher of the Word needs to understand that though some of these aforementioned teaching methods can be a positive addition to a message, they are not to replace the preaching of the Word of God. Why? Because they are not the inspired Word of God, thus they fall significantly short in their potential impact in contrast to the Word of God. Though these things appeal to many, such actions eventually will hurt a church in the long run. Why? Because these methods are not what God ordained to build up believers, prepare them for ministry, give them a deep understanding of the things of God, or a solid foundation upon which to stand in their Christian faith (cf. Mat. 7:24-27; Eph. 4:11-16). God gave the Bible for this task. This is why Paul told young Pastor Timothy, "I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths" (2 Tim. 4:1-4). The minister of the Word of God needs to make sure that he too is "ready in season *and* out of season" to "reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." This can only be done with the Bible and by its teachers who work hard at studying it, preaching and teaching it (1 Tim. 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:15). This cannot be accomplished by those who desire only to tickle men's ears. Let's be ministers who are men of God's Word!





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## **APPLICATION QUESTIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERS, CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONARIES AND CHURCH PLANTERS:**

1. How important is the Bible to your ministry? As stated above, "To answer this, all one has to do is consider some of the following questions." Please take some time to answer them now.
  - a. How much time do you spend reading the Bible each day?
  - b. How much time do you invest each week in studying it before you preach and teach it?
  - c. How often do you carry it with you to have it available for potential ministry opportunities?
  - d. How much time do you spend memorizing it?
  - e. How many times have you read the entire Bible from cover to cover?
  - f. How well can you use the Bible in teaching, counseling, and refuting false doctrine and false teachers?
  - g. How much do you focus your attention on applying the Word of God to your life?
  
2. Do you need to improve in your use of the Word of God? If so, in what areas of your life and/or ministry? Please use the questions above as a guide. Write a plan for improvement in three of these areas:
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3. As a result of reading this article, what will you do differently in your church in regards to using the Bible?