

CHAPTER 2

THE UNIQUE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCURATE DOCTRINE

*Surely the Lord GOD does nothing,
without revealing his secret
to his servants the prophets.
Amos 3:7 (RSV)*

¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)

*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.
Matthew 24:35 (ESV)*

*¹⁷ I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. ¹⁸ For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.
Romans 16:17-18 (ESV)*

³¹ but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name

John 20:31(RSV)

²⁴for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, ²⁵but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you

1 Peter 1:24-25 (ESV)

It is our duty to try to understand God and it is possible to do so

Although there is always more to learn, we can, reasonably expect to reach a place where we do genuinely have a good understanding of God and His Word. It is not a hopeless project, at which we can never succeed. It can be done. We can realistically aim to reach a place of maturity and thorough knowledge, even though that knowledge is never complete or perfect. But most of us are not achieving that. Our problems, and our failures to achieve God's purposes, mainly come from not understanding God. In particular we fail to understand the following things about Him:

- a) His character and nature
- b) His ways
- c) His principles
- d) His aims and objectives
- e) His priorities
- f) His standards

- g) His holiness and righteousness
- h) His hatred of sin and wickedness
- i) His judgment and anger
- j) His mercy and grace
- k) His love for the Jewish people
- l) His love for the Church
- m) His love for the lost
- n) His ultimate plans and purposes for world history

The importance of accurate doctrine

The above list of subjects, and more besides, which we are all meant to know and understand, is what we might call 'doctrine'. It is largely about understanding God's character, ways, plans and intentions, so that we can truly know Him. If our doctrine is wrong, then our view of God will also be wrong. If so, then we are in deep trouble, because wrong beliefs about God always have some adverse consequence.

We are likely to end up degenerating further into more error, or even into apostasy, whereby we cease to believe the truth and live in such a way that we are worse than those who have never believed. The Bible speaks of a generation on this earth in the last days, before Jesus returns, who will display all these characteristics. Consider the following passages from Paul's second letter to Timothy. Ask yourself whether we might, perhaps, be that particularly apostate and godless generation which Paul describes:

¹But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: ²For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, ⁴traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

2 Timothy 3:1-5 (NKJV)

If there was ever a generation in the Church who were "lovers of themselves", it is surely us in the Western churches. Plus, the sins and characteristics that Paul lists seem to fit today's Church exactly, more so than with any previous age. Given the awfulness of what Paul describes, note his proposed response to it all. Paul's advice to Timothy is to focus on the Bible.

He urges him, in the face of all that is coming, to devote himself to the Scriptures. But Timothy already knew the Scriptures better than most of us do. Therefore, Paul's advice to us would surely be even more emphatic. Paul then sets out what the Bible has to offer and why we need it:

¹⁰But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, ¹¹persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. ¹²Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. ¹³But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, ¹⁵and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation

through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:10-17 (NKJV)

Also, when Paul is telling Titus what qualities and characteristics an elder or overseer needs to have, he places great emphasis on his being able to hold firm to God's Word and *sound doctrine*:

⁷For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Titus 1:7-9 (ESV)

But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.

Titus 2:1 (ESV)

Furthermore, have you noticed in 2 Timothy 3:10 above that when he refers to how Timothy has imitated his life, Paul focuses, first and foremost, on doctrine? He puts it ahead of all the other qualities that Timothy was also seeking to acquire. That would surprise many people today. If you were seeking to imitate Paul, as we all should be, what single characteristic would you put at the top of the list? You might choose any of his other qualities such as faith, courage, perseverance etc, but you probably wouldn't have said doctrine. Yet that was first on the list for Paul, and also for Timothy.

It should therefore be first on our list too. But most of us would have to admit that it isn't, and that we are often shaky and vague about what we believe. Indeed, many of us are in an even worse condition. We live in an age when sound, biblical teaching and accurate doctrine are particularly rare and undervalued. In fact many of us seek the very opposite and immerse ourselves in false doctrine and foolish myths. Apostle Paul prophesied that the churches would one day degenerate in this way:

I 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: ²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

2 Timothy 4:1-4 (ESV)

Paul did not view doctrine as being something obscure or technical, the study of which we can safely leave to others. His approach was the opposite of what we see today. In the modern Western churches, standing up for accurate doctrine is often seen as 'hair splitting', or even bigotry. Anyone who stands up for truth today, even within the Church, let alone outside it, will receive more abuse than praise.

We are a generation which has little or no regard for truth and which cannot see why it matters so much to get our beliefs right. It actually makes sense for Paul to place so much emphasis on the accuracy of our doctrine. Ultimately, everything we do stems from what we believe. Therefore if our beliefs are wrong, then other things will also end up being wrong.

It is absurd to suggest that nothing is objectively true or false and that all things are relative or subjective. The reality is that some things are true and some are false in objective terms. There are some things about which we have to be 'black and white' and where any wooliness or compromise is wrong. Therefore we must change our attitude towards doctrine and make the pursuit of objective truth a very high priority, especially when it comes to gaining a correct understanding of God's Word.

Note also the very troubling words written by apostle John in his second letter about any person who “does not abide in the doctrine of Christ.” John warns us to avoid such a person, i.e. not to let them into our homes, or even greet them, because of the serious harm that false doctrine causes. He even refers to what they teach as “wicked work”:

⁹ Anyone who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting; ¹¹ for he who greets him shares his wicked work.

2 John 9-11 (RSV)

The excellent Bible teacher, Jacob Prasch, says that there are twice as many verses in the New Testament which urge us to develop accurate doctrine than there are verses which urge us to good behaviour. Jacob makes the further point that that is probably because it is accurate doctrine which leads us to good conduct, whereas false doctrine will always lead us to bad conduct and wrong lifestyles. In other words, there is a strong correlation between what we believe and how we live.

The authority of Scripture

Let's remind ourselves of what Paul said to Timothy about what Scripture is:

¹⁶All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NASB)

This second letter to Timothy was written very shortly before Paul was executed. He knew he was imminently about to die. He was taking his last opportunity to advise and encourage his right-hand man, on whom so much depended. That fact alone must give this passage a special significance. Therefore, note carefully what Paul chooses to emphasise.

Ahead of all the other things he could have emphasised, Paul zooms in on the importance of the Bible. He tells Timothy that"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.....". Paul means that every verse is inspired by God. It is all God-given and it all reveals what God thinks. It is not just the thoughts and ideas of men.

That is the uniqueness of Scripture. We have to remember that it is God's own Word and realise, therefore, what immense authority and importance it has. Some of us might respond that we already know that the Bible is God's Word. But do we really? For many of us our actions don't suggest that that is what we really believe.

Surely, if we truly believed that Scripture was God speaking to us, then it would play a far greater role in our lives? It would be at the centre of all that we do. But for very many of us who claim to be Christians, the Bible is only at the margins of our daily lives and has very little influence on our decisions and actions.

The Bible is not merely to be "taken into account" or applied "to the extent that we agree with it, or consider it to be relevant". It has infinite authority. There is nothing else that is equal to it, let alone higher than it. We must always bring our lives into line with it, never the other way round. What else can we do if we believe that it sets out God's thoughts and commands? Anything less than full obedience would be illogical.

How can any of us be so ridiculous as to 'disagree' with God? Likewise, how can we have the arrogance to pick and choose which parts of His Word to accept? Only a fool would do those things.

The reality is, however, that most of us do all of those things, much of the time, without even realizing it. If we did ever stop to think about it, we would have to admit that such an attitude is absurd.

The infallibility of Scripture - it contains no errors at all

The Bible has total authority. It is completely infallible, and there are no errors in it, i.e. in the original Hebrew or Greek. Many ordinary books are authoritative, to some extent, even though they are only written by men. But the Bible goes much further than that. It claims to be all of the following and more:

- a) perfect - it is never wrong and contains no mistakes or inaccuracies at all;
- b) morally/ethically accurate;
- c) historically accurate;
- d) scientifically accurate;
- e) prophetically accurate - it tells us what will happen in the future;
- f) totally reliable - it will never fail or let you down.

Many of us, including church leaders, have lost sight of the truth about the infallibility of the Bible. The majority of professing Christians in our day, even real ones, do not believe that the Bible is totally true, accurate and reliable. Few churches teach that at all, let alone emphasize it. Most Western church leaders today do not have enough confidence in the Bible to be able to say any of (a) to (f) above.

On BBC Radio 4 in 2011, they were doing a series of readings from the King James Bible to mark its 400th anniversary. Each reading was introduced and discussed by a supposed expert who commented on it. On one particular day the theological "expert" was being very patronising and condescending about the Bible. He informed us that although the reading for that day was: *"of course, not literally true, but merely myth, that 'myth' still has importance for us"*.

That was how that theologian saw the Bible. He spoke as if it was a book of children's stories and fables. He is not alone. Millions would agree with him, even within the churches. But his view of the Bible was illogical. If the Bible isn't true, but is merely a 'myth', then we should not honour it at all. We should get rid of it.

We would be better off reading the newspaper because that does, at least, contain some facts. Myths have no use at all, especially if they are falsely pretending to be facts. If the Bible is just myth, rather than genuine, literal truth, then we should leave it alone completely. We need the truth, not interesting stories.

How do we know that the Bible is true?

The truth may be what we are looking for, but the question is does the Bible provide it? Is the Bible really infallible or isn't it and how can we know? What proof is there? The answer is that there are many ways in which we can know that the Bible is absolutely true. Let's consider just a few of these:

- a) Jesus said it is true

On many occasions Jesus quoted from the Hebrew Scriptures, which we call the Old Testament. When He did so, it was always with full and unqualified approval. He also endorsed it as true and

spoke of it as fact, never as mere stories. For example he spoke of Satan's fall, creation, Adam, Noah, the worldwide flood, Lot, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Moses and his miracles, the Exodus from Egypt, Jonah and the huge fish, and much more. There is not a single example of Jesus failing to take the Bible literally.

Jesus also validated the prophets. In particular, He validated Daniel, by referring to him as "*the prophet Daniel*". But if Jesus endorsed Daniel in that way, and accepted his prophecies as genuine, as He also did with many other prophets, then who are we to doubt them or to reject what they wrote? Jesus knew the whole Old Testament and He never called any of it into question. So why should we?

b) Apostle Paul said it is all true

As we've seen above, Paul said that all Scripture is inspired by God. That is simple enough. It means *all* of it, without any exception. That being so, how can *any* of it be wrong? God does not make mistakes. Neither does He lie or exaggerate.

c) Apostle Peter validated the writings of Paul and referred to them as 'Scripture'.

There is an important passage in Peter's second letter in which he refers to the letters of apostle Paul. Peter commends Paul's letters to us and equates them with "*the other Scriptures*". Thus, he clearly saw Paul's writings as being equal in authority to the Old Testament Scriptures, even when they were first written:

¹⁵And count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

2 Peter 3:15-16 (RSV)

Note, by the way, that even apostle Peter recognized that Paul's letters are sometimes "*hard to understand*". That remark ought at least to encourage those of us who have ever found Paul complicated. We are in good company.

d) Apostle Peter also validates all the Old Testament prophets and all the other apostles too

Consider this next passage from Peter. He tells us that *every* prophecy in the Bible is from God:

²⁰First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, ²¹because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

2 Peter 1:20-21 (RSV)

If that isn't clear enough, Peter then goes on to give his personal seal of approval to all the Old Testament prophets and to all the apostles too. He refers to the LORD Jesus as having given *His* commandments *through* the apostles:

¹This is now the second letter that I have written to you, beloved, and in both of them I have aroused your sincere mind by way of reminder; ²that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles.

2 Peter 3:1-2 (RSV)

The sufficiency of Scripture

The Bible may be authoritative, and it may be infallible, but is it *sufficient*? Does it provide *all* that we need, or do we need something else as well? Does it have any deficiencies, such that we need to fill the gaps by also looking at the teachings of men? The answer is that the Bible contains everything we need in order to achieve all the objectives that God has set for us. But what are those objectives? What exactly is the Bible sufficient for? We can answer that by looking, once more, at what Paul told Timothy:

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

Let us take each of these things in turn and examine what exactly the Bible is profitable for:

1) for teaching (i.e. doctrine)

The Bible contains all the doctrine that we need to be taught. There is nothing missing from the Bible that we *need* to know about. Of course, there are hundreds of other things we would *like* to know, but which God doesn't choose to tell us about. There are also some secret things that God does not want us to know about yet. Or they may be dangerous for us to dabble with. It is just as in a family, where the parents do not choose to share all their thoughts, concerns or plans with their children. God does the same with us.

Some things are too deep or complicated for us. They may fascinate us, but they could distract us, or even harm us, if we looked into them. It would be like telling a five year old child all about nuclear weapons, cancer, witchcraft and pornography. There are some things which it is best for a child not even to know about, let alone dwell upon. We are like children in God's eyes. He wants to shelter us from certain things. It is for our good, and we should be thankful for it.

So, God has filled the Bible with every doctrine that we need to know in order to do His will and achieve His purposes for us. But He chooses not to go very far beyond that. God deliberately ignores some issues and leaves certain intriguing questions unanswered. Even so, the Bible is still '*sufficient*'. It contains all that we *need* to know in order to do the things that God wants us to achieve, which is all that really matters.

2) for reproof

'Reproof' is an unfashionable word, especially to our petulant and self-obsessed generation. However, the Bible also contains all that we need in order to be able to challenge or confront ourselves, and also those under our care, or to whom we minister. Few people, if asked, would have put reproof second on their list of the things for which the Bible is useful. Not many would give it that much significance, or indeed any significance.

Few would even see reproof as a benefit at all, but Paul does, because God sees our great need for it. He intends the Bible to be used for that purpose. In other words, the Bible contains all that we need in order to expose and challenge our own faults, sins, foolishness, transgressions, iniquities and rebellion. Then we can reprove ourselves, and each other, about those things.

So, we may not have been looking for a 'manual of reproof', but we have got one, and it is perfect for that purpose. Our problem is that we don't like reproof. But that is another matter. Whether we like it or not, we need it. Therefore, from now on, as you read the Bible, begin to pray for the ability to see its reproof in relation to your own life.

Go out of your way to ask God for such reproof. Also ask Him to help you to receive it well, and to be willing to repent and to change. You could pray along these lines:

“Lord, please show me today, from your Word, some of my own sins, character faults, bad habits, or anything that displeases you. Open my eyes and help me to see your reproof as applying to me, not just to other people. Help me also to become willing to admit my sins, to repent and to change.”

3) for correction

Correction is similar to reproof, but here the emphasis is not on our *sin*, but on the mistakes, gaps and misunderstandings in our *beliefs*. The aim is to correct the errors in our doctrine. The Bible puts us right when we are mistaken, or where we have been wrongly taught, or deceived. No matter what we may have been told by others, and however wrong or incomplete our views may be, the Bible is sufficient to correct us.

It can get us back on the right track, with the right doctrinal understanding, if we will allow it to. But that will only work if we are determined to believe the Bible rather than believing what men say, or clinging to our own opinions or traditions. We must get all our views, beliefs, priorities and understanding from the Bible, rather than from tradition, or from the teachings of our particular denomination.

Unless we make a determined effort to do otherwise, most of us will unconsciously absorb our beliefs and practices from the people around us, not from the Bible. Therefore, if they are wrong, you will be wrong. Instead, we need to be like the Bereans (see Acts 17:11) and check carefully in the Bible for ourselves to see whether things are true or false, rather than just relying on our church’s traditional stance. Then we will be capable of correcting ourselves. We can also identify any errors in what we are taught.

However, if you aren’t seeking for the Bible to correct you, rather than to affirm your existing opinions, then you will probably remain in error. You would not even notice, the correction that the Bible contains. What is lacking, for most of us, is a heart that is even *willing* to be corrected, let alone seeking to be. To change that you could regularly pray something like this:

“Lord please speak to me today from your Word. Help me to see any mistakes, gaps, or wrong teaching in the things I currently think or believe. Show me my own errors and those of my teachers. Also show me the things I have not yet seen, or not yet been taught, so that I can change my thinking and enlarge my knowledge and understanding.”

4) for instruction in righteousness

The Bible is profitable for achieving *God’s* objectives, not necessarily *our own*. We may have all sorts of plans and objectives for our lives, but they may not be the things that God concentrates on in the Bible. Its main focus is on changing us to become like Jesus. That is what God aims for, and that is what the Bible is designed to achieve.

So, the Bible is capable of instructing us in righteousness. It contains all that we need to be able to understand what righteousness is. Firstly it shows us how to get imputed righteousness. That is the righteousness that is transferred to us by our being justified. It comes through repenting and believing in Jesus Christ.

Secondly the Bible tells us how to become sanctified, by gradually changing to become more and more like Jesus in practice, in the way we live and the quality of our character. Again, the only thing in doubt is whether we really want such righteousness. We ought to, because much is promised in the Bible to anybody who really wants to obtain righteousness, to the extent that they hunger and thirst for it and are willing to be persecuted for it:

***6" Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
Matthew 5:6 (RSV)***

10" Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11" Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:10-12 (RSV)

There are numerous things that we ask God for, but righteousness is very rarely one of them. For most of us, it is not even on our agenda. It needs to be much more highly emphasised and valued. We need to start pursuing it earnestly. Therefore, if you have already been born again, i.e. justified, by receiving the imputed righteousness of Jesus, you should now begin to pray for practical righteousness, i.e. sanctification. You could perhaps pray something along these lines:

"Father, thank you that Jesus has transferred His own righteousness to me, so that you now see me as if I had all His sinless perfection. Now please also change me in my daily behaviour, speech and attitudes. Please sanctify me. Give me the power and the grace to change and become more like Him, especially in those parts of my character where, at present, I am least like Him."

However, perhaps you realise, even as you read this, that you are not yet a real Christian at all and have not even had the imputed righteousness of Jesus transferred to you. If so then please refer back to Book One of this series, which explains how to become a Christian and be saved.

5) to equip us for every good work

Finally, the Bible equips and enables us to do every kind of good work that God has planned for us. It sets out what God wants us to do, and how to do it. Again, the only thing in question is whether or not we actually want to do those good works. Many of us, at least in the West, are uninterested in such things and don't even consider good works, let alone dwell upon the subject.

The Bible is the main way that God has chosen to make Himself known to us. And it is the one and only place from which to get our doctrines.

The Bible is the only reliable source of true, accurate doctrine. However, many people actually get their beliefs about God from all sorts of other places as well, such as church leaders, traditions, their own opinions, other people's opinions and even from the use of spiritual gifts. That is, they accept as doctrine things which were said by some person in their church as a word of prophecy, or as an interpretation of tongues.

None of these things, however genuine and valid they may be, can ever be a source of any doctrine. We must get those solely from the Bible. If not, we will inevitably become confused and deceived. We will also end up redesigning God and even creating our own god to match up with our own opinions, or the things we have been told, rather than accept the real God who is revealed in the pages of the Bible.

Moreover, we must accept the *whole* Bible and allow all of it to tell us about God and about what He thinks and says. For example, I come across many people who pick and choose which parts of the Bible they are going to accept and believe and which parts they won't. People rarely do that openly and explicitly. Not many people say express words to the effect of "*I do not believe, and will not accept, what the Bible says about.....*"

At any rate I rarely ever hear anyone who claims to be a Christian speaking as blatantly as that. They are more subtle, and less honest, about it. They therefore operate as if the Bible was a buffet bar, or a

pick and mix sweet stall. They feel entitled to choose which parts of the Bible to believe and which parts not to believe.

The net effect of this approach is that you will end up making your own god for yourself, in your own image, who shares all your opinions and priorities. For example, I have heard people say “*for me, God is love*” and that “*love is what we need to focus on*”. However, they ignore, or even deny, a host of other things about God’s character which are equally real and important, such as His holiness, righteousness, judgment etc.

I was discussing this with two different people recently and describing God’s holiness and impending judgment. Both of them, separately, said to me “*I don’t recognise the God you speak of*”. Neither of them were willing to believe that God would ever judge us or send anyone to the Lake of Fire. They had therefore both created a different god, of their own making, who does not do those things.

They felt more comfortable with that alternative god than with the real God, who is as He describes Himself in the pages of the Bible. Islam does the same thing. The god whom Muslims call ‘*Allah*’ is not the God of the Bible. He is profoundly different in many ways. Therefore he cannot be the same person as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The nature and characteristics of the real God are revealed to us in the Bible, not within the Koran.

In other words, we are not free to design our own god to suit ourselves, removing from the God of the Bible any characteristics or features which we don’t like. Many of us do that, but what we end up with is be a false god of our own making. Such a god is not worth having because it cannot save you. So, the Bible is sufficient for everything that God designed it for. Therefore we can have full confidence that the Bible is all we need to enable us to do those things that God is calling us to do. We do not need any further man-made ideas to supplement the Bible.

An example of such things being added to the Bible, or substituted in place of what it teaches, is psychological counselling and psychotherapy. These are said to be fields of science, though they are actually just pseudo-science. What we now call psychology has only really come into existence as a subject over the last 100 years. It has then ballooned in size over the last 50 years. It uses self-centred ideas to attempt to address the problems that come from our sinful, selfish, carnal natures. Psychology is a man-made way of looking at people and their problems, which is not found in the Bible.

In fact it is often the direct opposite of what the Bible says. That is why psychology and psychotherapy are so ineffective in dealing with the problems caused by our sins, especially our selfishness and pride. Apostle Paul says the Bible has provided all that we need for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness. Accordingly, the Bible is all we need to counsel ourselves, and others, about our personal problems, weaknesses and sins. What else could we need?

We certainly do not need the atheistic, and even occultic, ideas of misguided men like Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. They were the main founders of what we now call psychology. Regrettably, the beliefs, values and practices of such men have taken deep root in many of the churches in the West. It is now commonplace for Christians to seek to counsel people using the unbiblical, man-made ideas of psychology, rather than the God-given truth of the Bible.

Many churches even regard a degree in psychology as being necessary before one person can be allowed to counsel another. Therefore many theological colleges now offer psychology as a subject choice. They fear that students would not enrol if they did not offer it. This is particularly true in the USA, where it is said that churches are the biggest referral agencies to psychological counsellors, instead of counselling their own people themselves, from the Bible.

Therefore psychology could be said to be the biggest heresy in the world today, because what other false teaching is so widely accepted, even within the real Church? The majority of what psychology

has to say is not true, at least when it comes to sin. At its best, it is a pale imitation of the truth, because it originates from men's minds, not from God. At its worst, it is distorted and deceptive.

If you would like to know more about the errors of psychology, please go to the Real Christianity website and find the section for recommended ministries and Bible teachers. There is a section there about Martin and Deirdre Bobgan. They are both former psychologists who became Christians and now expose the falseness of psychology.

Psychology presents us with a false view of ourselves and of our faults, sins, duties and responsibilities. It may have some accurate insights into our behaviour and thinking, which may be of relevance in such areas as marketing or advertising etc. But, in all of the areas that really matter, it teaches the opposite of what the Bible says.

Thus, choose to put your trust and confidence in the Bible, not in man-made ways of thinking such as psychology. Let the Bible alone be your guide. Rely solely on it for instruction on all issues relating to human nature. If you want a manual on how to repair your car, you will need to look outside of the Bible, but if you want to know about the nature and ways of people, their problems, sins and foolishness, then your enquiries should begin, and end, with the Bible. It is all you need.

However, we need to study the whole Bible if we want the whole truth. We need the sum total of what the entire Bible says, not just a selection of short passages or verses, here and there, especially if they are taken out of context. In other words, although every verse of the Bible is *true*, only the whole Bible is *the truth*.

***The sum of thy word is truth;
and every one of thy righteous ordinances endures forever.
Psalm 119:160 (RSV)***

The power of Scripture

The Bible stands alone in all literature. No other book is 'living and active'. The rest are all dead works containing the frozen, captured thoughts of mere men. Other books may well have some value, sometimes a great deal of value, but they are not alive like the Bible is. The Bible is unique in this regard. Its words are filled with power to achieve all of the purposes which God has for it. The reason it is 'alive' is because it has been inspired by God.

He has put within its pages the power to convict us, move us, correct us and reach deep into us. No other book can do any of that. When we take into account the whole of God's Word and hold it all in a healthy tension, then each part qualifies, amplifies or clarifies the other parts. That way we get the complete truth, without distortions, omissions or errors:

¹²For 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. ¹³And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Hebrews 4:12-13 (NASB)

Whenever you read the Bible, the Bible is also reading you. It is engaging with you, responding to you, and probing into you. It is supernatural. God has put into the pages of the Bible some of His own power. He chooses to allow Himself to be represented by it, such that it says what He wants to say. He has chosen to give to the Bible the power to speak to us on His behalf. In addition to all of that God stands ready to bring to life any specific verse at the right moment for us.

Then it can stand out to us on the very day when we particularly need to see it. It could be a verse which you have read 20 or 30 times before, but which has never previously moved or affected you. Then, all of a sudden, God amplifies it or "makes it go fluorescent" for you. It then speaks to your need, matches your situation and "comes alive" for you. That is a common experience for anybody who loves God's Word and who prays for God to open their hearts to understand it.