Profiting From God's Word (Part 4)

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." (II Timothy 3:16-17). The word "profitable" denotes something that is useful, beneficial and advantageous. In these two verses we find areas in which we can profit spiritually from our knowledge and application of the Bible. Last week we considered the profitability of God's Word for correction. This week we turn our attention to its usefulness for instructing us in righteousness.

To be righteous is to be right in the sight of God. The denominational world has accepted the man-made doctrine of imputed righteousness. They quote Isaiah in saying that "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). By misusing this verse, they imply that it is not possible for us to be righteous ourselves. The only way for us to be righteous, they say, is for the perfect righteousness of Christ to be imputed (attributed, assigned) to us.

If the preceding doctrine were true, then we must wonder why God would give us His perfectly inspired Word for the purpose of instructing us in righteousness. After all, if we could not attain to righteousness, then why would we need to be taught righteousness? Someone might say, "The Bible does indeed instruct us in righteousness because it tells us that righteousness is imputed to us through Christ." This, however, flies in the face of other passages that clearly show us that we are responsible for living right. I John 3:7 says, "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous." This verse says nothing of imputation of Christ's righteousness, but rather loudly bespeaks the truth that we must ourselves be right in the sight of God. Furthermore, the word "impute" is used in regard to righteousness in the Bible, but when it is so used it is used in connection with man's obedience (Romans 4:22; James 2:23). In other words, God considers us righteous when we obey Him.

The necessity of personally being righteous having been established, we now return to the two verses under consideration and note that God's Word is that single standard for right living. If we want to be right in the sight of God, we must seek Him through His inspired Word and obey His will.

The words "righteous" and "righteousness" occur over 500 times in the King James translation of the Bible. Every time God's Word tells us how to live or even how not to live, it is instructing us in righteousness. All of the warnings against sin and all of the exhortations to faithfulness constitute instruction in righteousness. It would take us hours, if not days, to read all of these passages, but here are some that specifically mention righteousness.

"Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." (Romans 6:13).

"Awake to righteousness and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame." (I Corinthians 15:34).

"And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." (Ephesians 4:24).

"For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." (Ephesians 5:9).

Devoting as much space as we have to the word "righteousness" is not to take away from the value of the word "instruction." That word clearly indicates that God gave us His Word to guide us. It is not a book of suggestions. It is not a reference tool for seeing how people thought and lived several centuries ago. God's Word is instead "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12).

II Timothy 3:16-17 is proof positive of the tremendous power of the Bible. Taken together, these two verses show us that God's Word teaches us (doctrine) in a way that can convict (reprove) us, direct us to the right way (correction) and lead us home (instruction in righteousness). The time we give to a sincere study of God's Word is never wasted. "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11).

Mike Gifford