

Why I am a Christian (2): The Word

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] The Bible is a book unlike any other. As Irene said, it took over a thousand years to write and has many different human authors. It has changed and is changing the lives of billions of people. It speaks of ancient empires and of the growth of nations, but in the same breath, it describes the intimate workings of the individual human heart. It is more relevant than tomorrow's headlines and more reliable than the Encyclopedia Britannica. The Bible, this unique book which we in Scotland have had in our hands for over 500 years, is the second reason I am a Christian. If the first reason I'm a Christian today is because I live in God's world, the second is because I read God's Word. Psalm 19 contains both aspects. In verses 1 to 6, as we saw two weeks ago, we find God and His world. And then from verse 7 to 14, God and His Word.

The ultimate reason the Bible is a book unlike any other is that although it was written by many different human authors, its ultimate author, its ultimate author is God. That's why we refer to it as the Word of God. It's His book. It's His gift to us, telling us the most important things we need to know if we want to be truly human. Our fathers in our tradition described the Bible in this way.

The heavenliness of its matter, the efficacy of its doctrine, the majesty of its style, the scope of the whole, which is to give glory to God, the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, and the many other incomparable excellencies. Yes, that's the word we must use to describe the Bible, is it not? Incomparable excellencies. This Bible we have in our hands today is the second reason I'm a Christian. In these verses from verse 7 to 14, there are three aspects of the Word of God to which I wish to draw your attention. First, the perfection of the Word from verse 7 to 9. Then the preciousness of the Word in verse 10, and then the penetration of the Word in verses 11 to 14. Far from being an irrelevant, outdated book full of mistakes, the Word of God is wholly inspired, without error, life-giving, and as relevant as tomorrow's newspapers.

First of all then, we have the perfection of the Word in verses 7 through 9, the perfection of the Word. When we read these verses, our attention is automatically drawn to the many ways in which the Word of God is described. Law, testimony, precepts, command, fears, rule, fear, rules. We might find them all rather intimidating. They all seem so formal and feel more at home in the setting of a court than in a church, and more to do with God as judge than God as Father. Each has its own meaning, but it's what they are together that's important. They point to the completeness of the Word of God, that it covers every possible area of our lives. They're telling us in six different ways that the Bible is perfect. It's a thesaurus of perfection and a compendium of completion.

If our eyes are drawn to the way in which the Word of God is described in the first part of each clause, our eyes should equally be drawn to its virtues. It is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, and true. How many words, more words do we need to use to zero in upon its incomparable excellencies? In a world of fake news, the Bible tells the truth. In a world of distorted, cynical lies, the Bible is sure. In a world of sensuality, the Bible is clean.

[4 : 54] And then there's the third part of each clause describing the effect of the Word of God, or, as Irene put it, the stuff it does. It revives the soul. It makes wise the simple. It rejoices the heart.

It enlightens the eyes. It endures forever. It is altogether righteous. There's something here for every single human being. The Word gives life. It gives joy. It gives light. It gives wisdom. It endures. It's altogether righteous. This is the effect it has upon those who accept it, not merely as the Word of men, but as the Word of God. We may admire and respect the great works of human literature, but it cannot be said of any of them that they give life from the dead or light to the blind. Shakespeare may inspire, but only the Bible is inspired. I trust we're getting the overall picture from these verses of the perfection of the Word.

Does this mean that we understand everything about it or in it? Not at all. There are deep mysteries in this book we shall never grasp. Does it mean that we find everything in it palatable? Again, not at

all. There are deeply challenging things in this book we find hard to swallow, but the Bible is perfect. It is incomparably excellent.

When I bought my wife her engagement ring, I saw it for the first time in her finger, of course, after I'd asked her consent, and I thought it was perfect, both the ring and her finger.

[6 : 42] The diamond in the center of the ring was complemented by sapphires on either side. Whatever way the light struck the diamond, it would reflect a slightly different hue of color.

There was nothing about it which was flawed or imperfect. In certain lights, it would almost seem to glisten like a teardrop. And in other lights, it would flicker like a winter moon.

And in still others, it would sparkle like a warm ocean. The incomparable excellencies of the Word of God are like that diamond embedded in my wife's engagement ring. Shine light on it from every direction, and it's flawless.

In Psalm 119, verse 96 from the NIV, the writer sums it up perfectly. He says, To all perfection I see a limit, but your commands are boundless. There's something here for every kind of person, for king, for commoner, for those far away, for those near, for the young, for the old, for the rich, for the poor, for the wise, and for the foolish. There's something here for every discipline in which human beings engage, be it the sciences or the arts. There's nothing irrelevant.

And even though by human standards, the Bible is rather a large book, not one word of it is wasted. Time and again in my own life, I've discovered the Bible is true.

[8 : 18] Time and again, I've learned that what I thought was wrong, and what the Bible said was right. Time and again, I've been revived and enlightened by it. And after more than 35 years of close acquaintance with the Bible, I'm only growing stronger in my assessment of the perfection of the Word of God.

It's perfect not just because it is the Word of God, and He's its author. It's perfect not just because it truthfully sets before us who we are as human beings.

It's ultimately perfect because it tells us all about the God who is its author and its subject. Jesus said in the Bible, He said, these are the scriptures that testify about me. They talk about me.

Let me say that again.

The perfect Word of God reveals to us the perfect Son of God who has won for us perfect salvation from God.

[9 : 33] And so the perfection of the Word consists in the perfection of the Savior, Jesus Christ. If there was a better way of God revealing the perfection of His Son to us, He would have chosen that way, but He did not. He chose the best way and gave us in words we can understand the Bible.

To all perfection I see a limit. To the rising sun at dawn. To the milky way and a clear winter's night. To the vastness of the mountain ranges of the highlands. Yes, even to my wife's engagement ring.

But your commands are boundless. The Word of God is perfect.

Flawlessly inerrant and unmistakably divine in origin. Secondly, we have in verse 10 the preciousness of the Word.

The preciousness of the Word. A few years ago, a young man in England with two small children was left a widower after the untimely death of his young wife. He was understandably devastated.

[10 : 47] After the funeral, he found an envelope in her bedside drawer addressed to him written in her handwriting. Contained within was a letter she had written to him before her death.

It contained a pledge of love for him with instructions as to how to bring up their children. Down to the details of when to make their breakfast and lunch and dinner.

How he should speak to them about her. And how he could be the best father possible. It was such a beautiful thing for her to do.

When he found that letter, how he must have cried. But how also he must have treasured it. It would have become to him the most precious thing in the world. He would have prized every word.

And as the children grew, he'll have been sure to put every word in that letter into practice. She wrote a dying letter to him. And to him it's more precious than gold.

[11 : 53] David writes of the word of God. That it's more to be desired than gold. Even much fine gold. It's sweeter also than honey and drippings from the honeycomb. That's how precious the word of God is to David.

It's more precious to him than the finest gold. And it's sweeter to his taste than the finest honey. If you'd asked him what one thing would you take with you on a desert island.

You know what his answer would be. A copy of the word of God. It was entirely as important to David. As that letter was to that young widow a few years ago in England. How precious is the Bible to us. Especially given that we have so much more of it than David ever had. We have the entirety of the Old Testament and the New Testament. And we've had it freely available in our own native language for 500 years. These are the words of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Jesus who died for us as the sacrifice for our sin upon the cross.

[12 : 59] And who loves us infinitely. And who loves us as the Holy Spirit. And who loves us as the Holy Spirit. And who loves us as the Holy Spirit. And who loves us as the Holy Spirit. We treasure his dying words in our minds and in our hearts. How precious these words are to us.

In our sin and in our shame. Jesus says to us. Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy laden. And I will give you rest.

He invites us into forgiveness in new life. He gives us hope and eternal life in him. How precious are these words to us in our cares and anxieties.

He says. Cast all your cares upon me. Because I care for you. He invites us to find peace. In him saying.

Do not let your heart be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. How precious are these words to us. In our uncertainty and fear.

[14 : 01] Our hopes and our joys. Our livings and our dyings. The word of God is precious precisely because it does all these things we spoke about in our previous point.

It gives life in our dying. And it gives light in our darkness. It gives strength in our weakness. And it gives hope in our despair. There's something for every one of us here.

Because these are the words of God himself. The God who made us. The God who knows us. The God who loves us. The God who became one of us.

And knows all we need. And lovingly provides it for us. Let's clasp these words close to our hearts.

These incomparable excellencies which occupy the highest thoughts of the deepest theologians.

But which to us. In our day to day Christian lives. Are in the words of Jesus. More important than the bread we eat.

[15 : 09] And without which we cannot live. Or take another breath. The preciousness of the word. The perfection of the word.

The preciousness of the word. Then from verse 11 to 14. The penetration of the word. The penetration of the word. The word of God is perfect and precious. But its perfection and preciousness is seen in no greater way than it penetrates deep beneath our skin.

And it takes up residence in our minds and hearts. It ceases to be words we merely read and becomes the living reality of our lives.

All words do things. But the word of God, the Bible, does the most dramatic and transforming of all things. It's not so much that we search the Bible.

But that the Bible searches us. It warns us. It discerns our errors. It exposes our hidden faults and our presumptuous sins.

[16 : 15] Let me say that again. When we read the Bible, it's not as if we are searching it as much as it's searching us. It isn't as if we are studying it. But it's studying us.

As we get to the truth of what it says. It gets to the truth of who we really are. No other book, no other work of human literature has the power to penetrate so deeply into the human psyche as the Bible.

Man judges by the outward appearance. But God through his word judges the heart. And its penetration is complete. In verse 12, David talks about his hidden faults.

Sins which he has committed unwittingly. The Bible is an expert at showing us sins we have committed unintentionally. In verse 13, David talks about presumptuous sins.

Sins which he has committed intentionally. Even though he knew they were wrong, he did them anyway. Again, the Bible is an expert at showing us when we are sinning intentionally.

[17 : 23] The Bible confronts us even as the prophet Nathan confronted David after he committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband Uriah killed and says to us, You are the man!

There may also be times when we are the victim of being judged by others. They accuse us of saying or doing things that are wrong. And at times like these, we need to take a long, hard look at ourselves and also at the Bible and judge ourselves not by what others say of us, but what the Bible

says.

And it may be that our judgments, that their judgments of us were wrong. We may or not, may not choose to defend ourselves to our accusers.

But one thing at that stage, we know God has declared us innocent through his word. And that, at the end of the day, is all that really matters. But the Bible does not just penetrate our minds in the matter of our sins or otherwise.

It silently speaks to us about every area of our lives. Our joys and our sorrows. Our pleasures and our pains. Our delights and our darkneses.

[18 : 33] The book of Psalms is deeply embedded in our culture. So it's not surprising when we say that there's a psalm for every season.

The heart of many Scottish Christians beats to the rhythm of Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. John Calvin called the book of Psalms the anatomy of all the parts of the human soul.

In dark times, we repeat almost as a mantra the words of Psalm 23, verse 4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For thou art with me.

Thy rod and staff, they comfort me. But there's so much more to the word of God. We work through the Old and New Testaments. And we're hearing the very words of Christ himself.

The Christ who calls us to come to him and find rest for our weary souls. Who delights to tell us stories of his father's house and its many mansions. Who promises us forgiveness and hope through his sacrifice for us on the cross.

[19 : 41] Who assures us that he loves us to heaven and back. And because these are the words of Christ himself through his spirit, they go deep.

They go beyond the mind into the heart. And miraculously, they change us. Later in the Bible, in Hebrews 4, verse 12, we read these words.

The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. The Bible is living and active.

The words themselves are not. They are printed on a page. But it is the Holy Spirit through whom the word was written who is living and active. There are times when we read the Bible and we're amazed at how relevant it is to us.

[20 : 50] It seems to know exactly what we need to hear at the exact time we need to hear it. But perhaps we shouldn't be so surprised. After all, it's often is the God who made us, who knows us, who loves us.

The subject is the Lord Jesus Christ, who became flesh, and experienced all that's common to us. And it's directed as the Holy Spirit who lives within us, who knows exactly what we need to hear, exactly when we need to hear it.

And like that Roman sword, it goes beneath the skin, into our minds and hearts. I'm sure I'm not alone in dealing with all kinds of disturbing and worrying thoughts.

Like many of you, I'm sure I've got a habit of overthinking things, which of course makes everything worse. But it's amazing how often in my worst moments, I've opened up God's word and found exactly what I've needed to hear at exactly the time I needed to hear it.

But then, as we've seen, the word of God penetrates deep. In particular, those parts of God's word, which I've found most helpful, either tend to be located within the book of Psalms or in the gospel's presentation of Jesus himself.

[22 : 21] How tragic it is then, that for most people, the Bible is a book gathering dust on their shelves or sitting up in their lofts. Don't they know that what they have in the word of God is the most perfect, precious, and penetrating thing in the world?

What then is our response to all these things? Is it not the prayer of verse 14? Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

When confronted with the boundless perfection of the word and its heavenly excellencies, when we are brought face to face with the truth that the perfect word of God reveals to us the perfect son of God who was one for us, perfect salvation from God, we want to respond in faith and trust.

To give to our Lord, our rock and our redeemer, the words of our mouths and the thoughts of our hearts. We want to respond to the author and subject of the Bible by confessing our sin and turning to Him in faith and trust.

The world of God is the first reason I'm a Christian. The Word of God is an even more powerful reason why I'm a Christian. Let me encourage you today.

[23 : 53] If you have not already, start reading the Bible for yourself. Begin in the Gospel of Mark where you'll see Jesus Himself, our Savior and Redeemer.

From there, move out to the rest of the Bible. You'll find, as I have over 35 years, that the Bible is perfect and precious and penetrating.

May God bless our reading of His Word and its reading of us by pointing us to Jesus our Lord and our Savior.

May God bless you. May God bless you. May God bless you. May God bless you. May God bless you. May God bless you. May God bless you. May God bless you. May God bless you. May God bless you. May God bless you.

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