

Being Part of the Church

Lesson 2: Scripture

Notes for the leader: This is the second in a series of lessons about "Being Part of the Church." Everyone involved in prison ministry understands that the most important thing a Christian ex-inmate can do is get involved with a solid Christian fellowship in his community. What should he be looking for? This lesson focuses finding a church that takes Scripture seriously and uses it as the basis of their teaching and practice..

Introduction

In the first lesson in this series, we learned that the church is an important part of God's plan of salvation. He **calls us out of sin** and **calls us to commitment to Him**. He **calls us together** as a church and **sanctifies us – He makes us holy**. "Holy" means **"set apart" for God's purpose**. His purpose in calling us together as a church is that we can **support each other by using the spiritual gifts he has given us** to help **strengthen his church** and **build his kingdom**.

We have all known men (or women) who were able to follow Jesus faithfully while in prison, but just couldn't stay straight on the outside. And we have all asked ourselves "Why?" The answer often turns out to be that they tried to be "lone ranger" Christians. They weren't willing to submit themselves to the **discipline** and **accountability** – and **support** -- that a local church is intended to provide. **A Christian needs to be an accountable member of an active Christian community**. God doesn't expect us to succeed all by ourselves. **We need His help and the support of our local church**.

In the first lesson of this series, we emphasized some of the main things you should be looking for in a church – a community where the leaders and members

- **teach sound doctrine**, based on the Bible, God's Word,
- **demonstrate God's love**, both inside their own fellowship and by reaching out to others, and
- **work together as a unified body**, with each member **using the spiritual gifts** that God has given him or her for the good of the body.

In this lesson, we'll look at some things the Bible says about sound doctrine and God's word. We'll focus on Paul's second letter to Timothy.

Timothy was the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother, who had been raised in the Jewish faith. After Timothy had accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul took him along on his missionary travels. Timothy was with Paul during his first imprisonment. When he wrote this letter, Paul was in prison again. This time, Paul was facing execution. Timothy was in Ephesus, dealing with some problems in the church at that city. In this letter, Paul is writing some final advice to Timothy, and asks him to come to visit him one last time, if it is possible, before he is killed.

2 Timothy 3:1-5

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,

without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good,

treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God —

having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

The last verse in this passage – “having a form of godliness, but denying its power” accurately describes **some** churches today – they may **look** like churches when you walk in. They may play familiar music. They may have some Christian symbols in view -- but if you listen closely, there's **something missing**. They **leave out** some of those things that Paul said were "of **first importance**": that **Jesus died for our sins**, and was buried (**really**), and that he was **raised to life** again on the third day (**really**). These facts show the **power of God** over even **sin** and **death**. But you don't hear much about these facts in some churches. These are **not** the churches you want to be part of.

Paul's goes on to warn Timothy

2 Timothy 3:12-17

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,

and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

This passage – especially the last two verses – are the main focus of the questions for this lesson.

Notes for the leader: Hand out copies of the Small-Group Discussion Questions to each person. Depending on the size of the group, have them break into small groups of four to ten. Make sure that each group has a capable leader, who can keep the discussion moving and well-focused. Make sure the groups understand how much time they have. 15 minutes should be a minimum. 20 minutes is better. Give each group a time warning three or four minutes before they need to reassemble as a large group, so they can bring their discussion to an orderly conclusion.

Follow-up Discussion

Notes for the leader: The main purpose of the follow-up discussion is to make sure that each small group has grasped the main ideas of the study. You can skim quickly through the answers if it seems clear that everybody understands them. If not, pick a group that "got it" and have them explain the answers.

If circumstances permit, it's a good idea to walk around and listen to each group discussion so that you know who "got it" and who didn't.

1. (v. 12) What does Paul warn will sometimes happen to those who try to live a godly life? Have you seen this happen?

He warns them that they will be persecuted. Why? As Paul told Timothy, "in the last days, people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money " **Many people resent someone who, by righteous living, exposes their sin.** They want to be able to say, "Oh, **everyone does that,**" or "I really can't help what I'm doing." This is basically the same reason that the religious leaders hated Jesus; and Jesus warned his disciples, "**if they have hated me, they will hate you as well.**" So we can't say he didn't warn us!

2. (v. 16) Where does Scripture come from? What do you think this means?

Paul says that **all true Scripture comes from God.** Through the Holy Spirit, God moved and guided the men who wrote all the letters and books of the Bible, so that **what they wrote would be true.** Sometimes, as in John's Revelation, God gave the writer very specific instructions as to what to say. At other times, as with Paul's letters, he guided Paul's thoughts and gave him wisdom as he dealt with problems within the church and gave Godly advice. There are also books of poetry and history and prophecy, but all of them are inspired by God.

Peter says the same thing in 2 Peter 2, starting at v. 20:

2 Peter 1:20 – 2:2

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.

For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them —bringing swift destruction on themselves.

Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

In this same passage, we hear a warning about false prophets and false teachers, who will try to lead God's people astray.

3. (vv. 16-17) Why did God give us the holy Scriptures? How should we be using them?

First, God gave us Scripture for our **instruction** and **guidance**.

In the glove box of every new car, there is an "owner's manual", written by the people who designed and built the car. This manual provides some very important advice on **things you need to know** to keep your car running right and to operate it safely. It gives you some **warnings of things you should not do**, or you will damage your car. It gives you **instructions and advice** on things to do if something goes wrong.

We can think of Scriptures as **God's "owners manual,"** written for us, under the guidance of the one who designed us and created us. It tells us things we need to do to **keep our relationships healthy** and our lives on the right track, **spiritually and physically**. It gives us warnings about **things we should not do**, or we will **damage our relationships** and our lives, **spiritually and physically**. It gives us some instructions on what steps to take if we fall into sin and damage our relationship with God or with our families or with other people.

The scriptures are written, Peter says, **to correct us when we need correcting**. The ultimate purpose is that **we will be equipped to do God's will**. One of the most important purposes is to keep us from wandering too far away from the truth ... for **false teachings and errors will arise, even within the church**, and we need God's standard to measure our teachings against, again and again. Everyone who preaches the gospel or teaches the Scriptures **must** continuously test his teachings against God's word. Why? Because, as Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 4, starting at v. 3,

2 Timothy 4:3-4

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

Too many churches find pastors and teachers who will **tell them what they want to hear**, even if it isn't true. Sometimes these **false teachings** are fairly obvious, but most are **subtle** and therefore **more dangerous**. How can we keep from being misled? **We must know the Scriptures ourselves**, so we will know if someone is adding to their teachings or taking something away from them.

In Acts 17, Paul and Silas came to preach the gospel to the Jews in Berea. Luke records that "they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

Notes for the leader: Before the group leaves, make sure everyone has a copy of the "Take-Home Thoughts" handout. This will help them remember the things discussed in the lesson. Some of them may also use these handouts to explain the lesson to a cell-mate or in a letter they write to their families. You never know how far the lesson materials may travel, or whose life may be affected by them!

Small-Group Discussion Questions

God's Word – The Holy Scriptures *(2 Timothy 3:12-17)*

1. (v. 12) What does Paul warn will sometimes happen to those who try to live a godly life? Have you seen this happen?
2. (v. 16) Where does Scripture come from? What do you think this means?
3. (vv. 16-17) Why did God give us the holy Scriptures? How should we be using them?

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Take-home Thoughts About ...
Scripture-Based Teaching

When you look for a church in your community, **make sure you find a church that takes the scriptures seriously.** In his letter to Timothy, Paul emphasized that *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”* (2 Timothy 3:16)

God’s Holy Spirit guided every person who wrote the Bible **to make sure that what they wrote was true.** Why is this important? God gave us these scriptures to guide us so that we know how to live a life that is pleasing to Him.

The Bible can be compared to the “owner’s manual” of a car, which is written by the people who designed and built the car. This manual gives the owner important advice on how to keep car running right and how to operate it safely. It gives warnings about things you should **not** do, or you will damage your car. It gives advice on what to do if something goes wrong. **The Bible is like an “owner’s manual” for people,** written by the One who designed and created us. It give advice on how to keep our relationships healthy, both spiritually and physically. It gives warnings about things we should **not** do, or we will damage our relationships and our lives. It gives advice on what to do if we fall into sin and damage our relationship with God or with our families or with other people.

Unfortunately, some churches don’t take the scriptures very seriously. So false teachings may arise. And if people in the church don’t know the scriptures, they may be led astray by these false teachings. So **look for a church where people use the scriptures to test what they are being taught to see if it is true.**

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