

Why did God write the Bible?

There was a programme on television in England a few years ago entitled “The most dangerous man in Tudor England.” Some of you might have seen it. It was very good. Those of you who didn’t see it and don’t know what it was about – I wonder who you would say was the most dangerous man in England throughout the reign of the Tudors.

The programme was about William Tyndale. Why was William Tyndale considered to be such a dangerous person? It was because he was translating the Bible into English. He was translating it so that ordinary men, women, boys and girls could read it for themselves.

And the point of the programme was that this made Tyndale a dangerous man. It was dangerous because it would take away the strength and the power of the church establishment and the rich and wealthy. It would undermine the whole of society as it was then set up.

Why would it have such an impact? The answer lies in the truths that Paul sets out for us in 2 Timothy 3vs14-17 – “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

These verses tell us what God’s purpose is in giving us the Bible and what impact he will have in the lives of men, women, boys and girls through it.

The first reason that Paul gives is that the scriptures are “able to make you wise for salvation.” The word “able” that our translations use is not a particularly strong word. As we read this in our English versions we sometimes hardly even notice that it is there. But the word that Paul uses in Greek is a stronger word. What Paul says to Timothy is that the holy scriptures are “powerful” to make you wise. Paul believes that the Bible has power – the words of the Bible, the message of the Bible, the Bible itself – has the power to do wonderful things.

What is it that the Bible is powerful to do? It is powerful to make you wise for salvation. That is what made William Tyndale such a dangerous man 500 years ago in England. The message of salvation would be freely available to all thus removing power from the corrupt established church.

This is something which is truly wonderful and amazing. So what is Paul getting at when he talks about “salvation”? Although in Christian circles we use this word all the time it is not a word that is used regularly in everyday language. What does the word mean? It means being rescued from a situation which is absolutely disastrous – which is completely hopeless.

We used the derivative word “saved” far more often. Think of those 33 Chilean miners who were trapped for over two months in 2010. It was an absolutely disastrous situation and they were completely helpless. All looked hopeless. But a hole was drilled and tunnels were strengthened and a capsule designed and the men were freed. The rescuers brought salvation to those miners.

An earthquake devastates a region and the people of that area are left homeless and starving. They are freezing to death and they have got no clean water and many of them are still trapped under the rubble and there is a great humanitarian operation and relief workers fly in to the area and they dig out the injured and they bring in food supplies and restore water and electricity and they rebuild homes. They turn round the situation. We would say that they have brought salvation into that disaster situation.

That is what the word salvation means. It means being rescued from a situation where you can do nothing to help yourself – from a situation which is an absolute disaster. And Paul tells Timothy that the Bible has the power to make you wise for salvation. The Bible can give us the wisdom we need to be rescued from a totally disastrous situation.

How does the Bible do this? Firstly it does so by showing us the terrible state that each of us is in whether we believe it or not.

Think of those Chilean miners. We would have said they were stupid beyond comprehension if the capsule had arrived and they refused to get in. If they sent a message up to the rescuers and said there had been some mistake and there really was no problem and could they please be left alone. It is incomprehensible.

The Bible teaches us that we are all caught up in a terrifying disaster situation. It is a disaster that has been going on for thousands of years – almost from the beginning of human history. You and I are living in the throes of a crisis which began when the first human beings – when Adam and Eve – turned against God.

Up to that point this world was a perfect place. It was created by God for his pleasure and as a reflection of his being. There was nothing ugly, nothing painful, nothing broken. There was no death. It was a perfect world where every single creature on earth lived in peace and in security and where human beings were perfectly happy – completely fulfilled. And God was their friend. He was their father. He loved them, protected them and showered them with good things to enjoy.

And they enjoyed him. They enjoyed knowing God and walking with God. God was their perfect ruler and sovereign. But Adam and Eve did the unthinkable – they rebelled against God. They decided they wanted to rule the world themselves. They wanted to depose God from his rightful position and take his place. They thought that they knew best and they would run the world in their own way.

And ever since that day this world has been at war with God. People across the globe have been fighting against God – refusing to worship him and to obey his commands. We think we have the right to decide what our lifestyle should be without reference to God. We pick our own rules and make our own gods. We pretend that God is not there – that he does not exist.

And what has been the result of this rebellion – this enmity against God? God has been showing his anger against the human race. He has taken away his protection and the consequences of sin have coursed through every part of our world and our existence. Pain and illness and death have come into the world. Millions die of starvation. Every 15 seconds a child dies because of hunger or malnutrition even though there is more than enough food to go round.

And elderly people rot away as their minds and their bodies decay. The world has become a nightmare place. A place of war and hatred – of chemical weapons, of horrific violence and of injustice. A place where people are exploited and abused and tortured. A place of selfishness and self-indulgence where people are driven by and live for things that they know will never satisfy and will only ever lead to misery.

That is our world. And it isn't what just goes on around us. This is what goes on inside us. If we look inside ourselves we will find the same rottenness and corruption; the same selfish desires and the same godlessness. We are just as twisted as everyone else in the world. We have all had times when rage and hatred have welled up inside of us; we have all had times when the only thing that seemed to matter to us is getting our own way and times when we have only ever thought about ourselves.

Disaster is around us and in us. And so dreadful is this disaster that it doesn't even come to an end at death. If anybody dies without God then after death they will still be without God. The only difference then will be that all the restraints are taken away and it will become obvious just how much they were against God all along.

Those who die without God become unrestrained, hate-filled monsters in the age to come. This is what hell will be. And that is our destiny because God has promised that he will deal with evil and with our rebellion against him.

It is a place of everlasting judgment – of everlasting fire. And it is into that place that every godless person will be cast. And it is there that they will remain in an eternity of misery and despair. That is the disaster situation that we are talking about.

Until we have understood that we will never understand what the Bible means when it speaks of salvation. Only when we see this in all its horror will we understand what a wonderful word "salvation" is.

So when Paul writes about "salvation" he is telling us that there is a way that we can be rescued. There is a way that we can be totally delivered from that whole nightmare situation. We can be saved and our war with God can come to an end. The evil in our hearts can be dealt with – taken away – and we can become new people. There is a way that we can be forgiven for every evil thing that we have done against God and each other.

There is a way that, even in this world, we can become happy, contented people at peace with God, glorying in his friendship and his fatherhood once more. There is a way that we can get to an infinitely better world – a new heavens and new earth where the peace will never be broken and where there will be no more crying or pain or hurt or anguish or fear or death. It will be a world of glorious unimaginable beauty which is full of love and endless joy.

This is rescue and salvation. God's children will live under God's smile forever. And Paul says to Timothy that the Bible is "powerful to make you wise for salvation". The Bible gives you the wisdom, the knowledge and the understanding that you need to be saved. The Bible has the power to open your eyes to things that you would never have found out for yourself, things you could never have understood on your own.

So then, what is the way of salvation that the Bible reveals? Paul sums it up in five words – "through faith in Christ Jesus". Where is the rescue? Where is the hope? Where is the

renewal of everything that is good and glorious and wonderful? It is in Christ Jesus who we receive by faith.

Faith means believing and trusting someone. Salvation comes through trusting Christ Jesus. The way to be saved says Paul, is by trusting in Jesus. That is *the* great thing the Bible teaches. And the Bible can bring you to the point where you have that faith because the Bible is powerful. How does the Bible do this? Well it does in four ways.

Firstly it tells us the facts about Christ Jesus. It tells us about the promises of God – that a king in the line of David would come to bring salvation. And it goes on to tell us about a baby born into poverty and scandal to a virgin mother. And it tells us about amazing things that happened that night as the heavens were opened and the host of heaven’s angels sang glory to God and proclaimed the wonder of salvation.

It tells us that the baby grew and became a man and it tells us about the life that he lived – a life of perfect holiness, but a life also like ours with hunger and tiredness with disappointment and rejection. And it tells us about the amazing things that he did in his life – the incredible impact that he made through his teaching and the signs, wonders and miracles that he worked – how he brought sight to the blind, release to the captive, relief to the oppressed, hope to the hopeless, love to the loveless and rejected and life to the dead.

And it tells us about the way that he prayed and the way that he served and his absolute submission to the will of God. And it tells us how he died. How his enemies hated him and tortured him and nailed him to a cross. It tells us that he died on that cross in agony and that as he did so he pleaded “my God why have you abandoned me?” It tells us that darkness came down on him and the whole earth as he died. It tells us that he was buried.

And it tells us that three days later he walked back out of the grave with a new body. And it tells us that forty days later he rose up into the skies and that angels told those who saw that one day he would return in the same way that he had now gone. The Bible tells us the facts about Jesus.

Secondly, the Bible tells us the meaning of those facts. It tells us that Jesus was not just a man, but that he was also God’s son come down from heaven. God the creator was born on this earth. He came into this disaster zone. And it tells us that he came as one of us to stand with us in this ruined world taking on himself all the consequences of our war and rebellion against God.

The Bible tells us that Jesus did all this because he was living the life that we couldn’t live – a life of perfect shining obedience to God the Father in every way. And it tells us why this perfect man had to die such an awful death. It was because he was taking our place. The sins of his people were placed on him and God made war on him. He was punished for what we are. He was trampled in the wine press of God’s fury because of us. All the anger of the Father that should have been directed against us, was directed against him instead. “He bore our sins in his body on the tree.” “God made him who had no sin, to be sin for us.”

And it tells us the meaning of the resurrection. It was because he had fully paid the price of sin. There was no punishment left – not even the smallest bit. All those for whom he died had had their penalty fully paid. And the Bible tells us why he was raised to heaven – it was so that he could be enthroned and rule in power to work in us and through us to bring his kingdom to fulfilment.

The Bible shows us the facts about Jesus and it shows us the meaning of those facts. And thirdly, the Bible makes us aware that Jesus Christ is really trustworthy. The Bible shows us how uniquely amazing and uniquely attractive Jesus is. We see that he is utterly reliable and that he is the saviour.

The word of God in the Bible draws us to Jesus. As we properly get to understand the wonderful gospel message of the Bible we are compelled to come to him because we realise that he is indeed the only way and the only hope. We know that everything else and everyone else lets us down, but the Bible makes us realise that this is not so with Jesus. It powerfully opens our eyes and draws us.

And fourthly, the Bible tells us, it commands us, it invites us, it pleads with us to trust Jesus. The Bible tells each one of us that we as individuals can come to him. As we are made more wise about the need and the way of salvation and we are brought to the point where we want to come to Jesus, what does the Bible say? It holds out open arms and says “come, come and be saved.”

“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” It tells you to come. All of us who are Christians can testify to the truth of all of this – the truths of the Bible, the truths about Jesus brought us to him and we have tasted salvation.

Why did God write the Bible? Because it is in the Bible and only in the Bible that we will find the way of salvation from the desperate and hopeless state we are in because only the Bible is powerful to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

But then Paul continues in vs.16 that God wrote the Bible to teach, reprove, correct and train in righteousness “that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

The Bible is profitable for teaching. To teach is to impart knowledge of or skill in, to give instruction; to inform, to enlighten, to discipline, to coach. And Paul says that the Bible should be used as the basis for this teaching. God-breathed scripture provides us with a complete body of truth. It is everything that God, our creator, knows is necessary for us to live our lives in a way that glorifies him.

And what we see is that the teaching of the Bible is instruction about God and his ways. The Bible teaches us who God is. If we want to know about God we look in his word.

The Bible teaches us who we are – how we got here and the reason we are here. It teaches us how we are to respond to God in terms of what his requirements and expectations are and in terms of how it is possible that these requirements and expectations be met. As we have already said, it teaches us about salvation in Jesus Christ. It teaches us about Christian living in the home, at work, in church, with our neighbours and in society at large. It teaches us about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It teaches us about our future. It teaches us about the consequences of unbelief and rejection.

The Bible teaches us everything we need to know for our wellbeing as God’s creatures – everything.

The next three things that Paul says then break down the profitableness of the Bible for teaching into more specific areas. Paul says that the Bible is useful for rebuking or

reproofing. A rebuke is something which should convict the reader or hearer of wrong behaviour or false doctrine.

A regular and careful study of the Bible builds a foundation of truth that, among other things, exposes sin in our lives with the purpose of bringing correction, confession and obedience. The Bible is an uncomfortable book at times because it invariably runs against the grain of our natural thinking. It unsettles us.

Every Christian who has been saved for any length of time has experienced times of being sharply and deeply convicted by reading a particular Bible passage or hearing it preached or taught. Every Christian also knows that during times of disobedience they are strongly tempted to give up on Bible study and worship and finds that fellowship with God's people becomes less attractive and comfortable. That is because none of us like to feel the sharp pangs of conviction that comes from God's word as it rebukes us.

The Bible is God's standard by which every thought, every principle, every action and every belief is to be measured. And to have such a source to rebuke us and convict us is invaluable. The writer of the proverbs tells us in 6vs23 – "For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life."

If we were never rebuked for our wrong doing; if we were just left to carry on in our folly and stupidity, blindly doing just what we wanted to do without a care or thought for God then we would never have life. So rebuke from God's word is vital for our eternal wellbeing because it is only through responding to rebuke and conviction that we come to the way of life.

The third thing that Paul says is that the Bible is useful because not only does it rebuke, it also corrects. You can see how these two ideas fit together. In his teaching of us, God doesn't just give us the negative – the rebuke – he also gives us the positive – the correction.

The word that Paul uses here for "correction" is found nowhere else in the Bible. It is a word that refers to the restoration of something to its original and proper condition. In other Greek literature of the time it was used when writing about setting an object upright which had fallen down or of helping a person get back on their feet after they had stumbled.

And that is what the Bible does. After exposing and condemning false believe and sinful conduct, it then builds us up through its divine correction. It tells us the right thing to believe or the right way to go. The Bible does not leave us in any doubt. It shows us what is right and tells us how we can be equipped to obey.

Think of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. Much of the early part of that sermon is taken up with Jesus correcting what had previously been taught to the people. He lays out his foundation for this in 5vs17 – "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."

Then he goes on to give the proper interpretation of the law of God and to make its proper application to his hearers lives. Vs.21 – "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder...' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment...Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the alter and there remember that

your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

Then in vs.27 the same form of words appears again – “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

The same occurs in vs.31 – “It has been said....But I tell you...” And again in vs.33 – “Again you have heard...But I tell you...”. Then again in vs.38 – “You have heard...But I tell you...” and finally in vs.43 – “You have heard...But I tell you...”

Jesus was correcting his hearers and our thinking about what we think obedience to God’s law means. The Bible gets our thinking where it should be and then tells us how we are to apply it in our lives. In each case Jesus spells out the practical consequences that a correct mindset will have. Correct thinking will lead to a correct course of action.

The Bible corrects what we have got wrong. It stands up what we have knocked down. It makes straight what we have made crooked. And again we know and see how useful this is. We are God’s people – saved by the blood of his Son and we are part of God’s family so we must be as our Father wants us to be.

And fourthly, the Bible trains us in righteousness. This follows on again from the rebuking and correcting that we have just considered. The Bible convicts us of what is wrong, it tells us what must be done to make things right, but it doesn’t stop there. Because it is not enough just to put right wrongs. So the Bible also trains us in righteousness.

As God’s people we are to be positively living for Christ as servants in his kingdom. And the Bible tells us the sorts of things that we, as God’s people, should be doing. It tells us the righteous things that should be the characteristics of our lives. Paul himself wrote to the church at Ephesus earlier in his ministry. In Eph. 4vs28 we read – “He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.”

The first part of this verse is correction – “He who has been stealing must steal no longer.” And the second part of the verse is training in righteousness – “...but must work doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.” It is not enough to stop stealing, you have also got to start working and start giving.

Then he goes on in vs.29 – “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths...” That is correction. “...but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen.” That is training in righteousness. Everything that we say must not only not do harm, rather it has to do positive good.

Then in vs.31 he says – “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.” That again is correction. “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” We are to strive for righteousness just like Christ was righteous.

It is the Bible that tells us how we are to live in every aspect of our lives. And the Bible gives us the strength and the wisdom to put into practice what God requires from us. How do husbands know how they are to treat their wives? The Bible tells them. How do wives know

how they are to treat their husbands? The Bible tells them. How do parents know how to treat their children and the responsibilities they have? The Bible tells them. How do children know how to respond to and treat their parents? The Bible tells them.

How do employers and employees know how they ought to behave in the workplace? The Bible tells them. How do church members know how they are to live in church life? The Bible tells them. How do citizens know how they are to act and live in society? The Bible tells them.

The Bible tells us the righteous way we are to live in every sphere and aspect of our lives. It trains us in comprehensive righteousness.

And then thirdly, having given us the way of salvation and taught, rebuked, corrected and trained us, the Bible makes us complete as human beings – equipped for every good work.

It is interesting to understand the actual words Paul uses here. The NKJ is a better translation than the ESV at this point. It renders the verse – “that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

There is a great comprehensiveness in the words Paul uses. Three times he uses exhaustive words – “complete”, “thoroughly” and “every”. Paul is being emphatic. He is not leaving any room for misunderstandings. There is nothing not covered by the scope of Paul’s description. Whatever good work a man of God, a woman of God, a child of God is called to do, then the scriptures, the Bible, is the totally sufficient equipment to do it.

It applies to evangelism, Bible teaching, counselling, reformation, church-planting, missionary service, dealing with false teachers, ministering to the dying, facing persecution and speaking for Christ from the dock, dealing with politicians, caring for the unlovely, the difficult and the thankless, giving a reason for the hope we have, raising children, giving your money, showing hospitality, ruling your home, disciplining church members – the list goes on and on. The Bible leaves us lacking nothing. It thoroughly equips us for every good work.

The Bible can show you how the job is done. It can give you all the counsel and guidance you need to do it. It can enable you to carry it through in a way that honours God.

Let’s just think through a specific scenario. 1 Peter 4vs9 exhorts us to “show hospitality to one another without grumbling.” That is a good work which every one of us is called to do. How does the Bible equip us for this work?

Firstly, it gives us examples of people who showed hospitality and opened their homes. There are many throughout the whole book – Abraham, the widow of Zeraphath, the Shunnamite woman, Mary, Martha and Lazarus and Lydia. We can see their example and learn from them.

The Bible tells us what our attitude is to be in providing hospitality – “Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2vs4). “Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.” (1 Tim. 6vs18).

The Bible tells us the things to think about when we prepare the menu – “Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.” (Rom. 14vs1)

And the Bible encourages us by telling us what Christ thinks of hospitality offered in a biblical way – “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink?’...The king will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’” (Matt. 25vs37-40).

“Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honours him.” (Proverbs 14vs31).

There are many more things we could say, but this illustrates the point. The Bible exhorts us to a good work. It tells us how in terms of attitude and action. It motivates us negatively and positively. And it shows us how by example.

But most of all the Bible thoroughly equips us for everything by constantly reminding us that our strength does not come from ourselves. Rather it comes from the indwelling Holy Spirit and this drives us to our knees in humble submission before Christ seeking his help in everything that he has called us to do.

Why did God write the Bible? To make us wise for salvation. To teach us, rebuke us, correct us and train us. To complete us and thoroughly equip us for Christlikeness. Praise God.