

Testament quotations are for contrast with his own teaching. His last discourse in John's gospel does not contain a single quote. It is only on the Emmaus road after his resurrection that we find him opening the scriptures to two of his disciples.

Of the gospel writers Matthew quotes very extensively to illustrate the fulfilment of scripture. Mark and Luke do so too, but less. John scarcely does at all.

In the book of Acts, Peter, Stephen and Paul all quote extensively in their preaching. Often their objective is to show from the scriptures that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

Paul's letters vary in the extent to which he makes use of scripture. Romans and Galatians are at one end of the scale with a lot of quotation. Colossians and Thessalonians are at the other with none.

Hebrews, being written to the Jews, naturally has more quotations than any other New Testament book. Peter quotes a lot; James quotes sparingly; and John in his letters not at all. John was almost certainly the latest of the New Testament writers. Jude, interestingly, makes two quotations from books that are not part of what we regard as the Bible (The Assumption of Moses and The Prophecy of Enoch). He makes no quotations from the books that we call the Old Testament.

The book of Revelation has some quotes and many visions similar to those of Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah and others.

This writing, you may have noticed, has extensive quotations from the Scriptures!

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The Scriptures

and

The Word of God

and he will provide for our needs. If we are simply trying to do what the Bible says, we may land ourselves and our families in deep trouble.

The Bible says: “I am the Lord who heals you” (Ex 15:26). Many people take this as a personal promise to them or their loved ones. Often they are deeply disappointed when no healing takes place. Actually this was a conditional promise to the ancient Israelites. (See Ex 15:26). When God gives you a personal promise to heal you (the word of God), it will happen every time.

Conclusion

Traditional logic has said:

- “All scripture is inspired by God”. This of course is true.
- Therefore, the Bible is the Word of God. This is partially true.
- Therefore, the Word of God is the Bible. This is dangerously false!

This logic leads to serious misinterpretation of many verses that refer to the word of God. It puts the Scripture in the place of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit, and in the place of direct communication between God and man.

The Scriptures and the Word of God are separate and should not be confused. Each has a different function. The Word of God is greater and was there in the beginning with God. The Scriptures must not take its (his) place. Good things in the wrong place can become evil things, and blessings turn to curses. Many an evil thing has been done by people who knew much of the Bible, but nothing of the Word of God. Let us hear again the heart-cry of Jesus, “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of me; and you will not come to me, that you may have life”. Let us find the true meaning of the Word of God and give it its rightful place in our lives. Let us also give to the Scriptures their rightful place - the place they give themselves, the place Jesus and the early apostles gave them, and the place given to them by the word of God in our hearts.

Bible quotations are taken from the NIV or retranslated

Postscript

I will end with a brief survey of Old Testament quotations made by Jesus and others in the New Testament. Their wide variety can be a model for us.

Jesus, as we have seen already, quoted the scriptures in confrontation with the devil and extensively in confrontations with the Pharisees, but scarcely at all when teaching the multitudes or his disciples. In the Sermon on the Mount all Old

Commands and Promises

To summarise what I have been saying: God's primary method of speaking to people is not through Bible reading. It is initially through his ministers (apostles, prophets, shepherds (pastors), teachers, and evangelists) and then increasingly through the Holy Spirit directly.

I want now to consider two particular ways in which God speaks. Throughout the scriptures God gave commands and instructions to individuals and groups of people. He also made covenants and promises, which were frequently conditional on obedience to commands. Some commands such as "Love your neighbour", are very general. Others such as "Take your shoes off your feet", are very specific. Promises in the Bible exhibit the same range. "All things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" is general. "I will bring you back to this land" is specific.

Many people believe and teach that all these commands and promises - or at least the more general ones - are for us today. Whole churches and denominations are built on this approach to the scriptures. However again we find that there is very little backing for it in the scriptures themselves. Certainly no one ever tried to obey a specific command or claim a specific promise that was given to someone else. The ten commandments and a few other general commands and promises from the Old Testament are quoted in the New. However, the general principle is, as we have seen, that God speaks by the Holy Spirit. If he has not spoken to us by the Holy Spirit, we will have neither the power to carry out any commands, nor the faith to receive any promises.

To seek to obey commands that were given to other people at other times, and not to you personally will lead you into bondage, frustration and failure. Equally to seek to claim promises that were made to others will lead you to doubt God, or live with a sense of frustration that you are missing the mark because nothing seems to work out for you. It worked for other people; why doesn't it work for me?

The fundamental reason is that you cannot receive either commands or promises through your mind. You must receive them deep in your spirit. You will then find their confirming echo as you read similar commands and promises in the pages of the Bible.

Let me give two examples: the Bible says: "go, sell all that you have and give to the poor" (Mark 10:21). This is a clear command from the lips of Jesus. If God tells us personally (the word of God) to sell our property, we should obey

Introduction

The phrase **the Word of God** occurs nearly 50 times in the New Testament, and is used times without number by Christians in books, sermons and ordinary speech. Do Christians use this phrase in the same sense as the Bible does? I believe **no**. Does it matter? I believe **yes**.

Using any word or phrase in a different sense from the Bible is dangerous. Doing so generally springs from a wrong understanding of spiritual truth, which it in turn perpetuates and reinforces. For example, people who use the word priest to mean an ordained member of some denomination, are generally blind to the true nature of priesthood. Those who continually use the word church to refer to a building or a denomination usually have little idea of the true church of God.

We cannot afford to adapt the meanings of words and phrases used in the Bible to suit our own traditions. It is pointless believing in the inspiration and authority of scripture and then using its words with meanings entirely different from their original.

In common parlance the phrase **the Word of God**, or often simply **the Word**, means the Bible. This is standard terminology among almost all who believe in the inspiration and authority of the Bible.

Firstly, I will show that, in the Bible itself, the phrase the Word of God does not mean the Bible, but has a different meaning; then we will explore the meaning and operation of the Word of God; after that we will seek to rediscover the right place and use of the Scriptures. May the Holy Spirit give us understanding as we do so.

Clarification

"The Bible is the Word of God." "The Word of God is the Bible." These two statements appear to say the same thing, but any student of logic will tell you they don't. "All dogs are animals" is true. "All animals are dogs" is obviously false! "All criminals are human beings" is true. "All human beings are criminals" is, thankfully, false. I am not saying, "The Bible is not the word of God". I am saying that "The word of God is not the Bible". Calling the Bible "the Word of God" leads to serious misunderstanding of many parts of Scripture, as we shall see.

The word of God is infinitely bigger and wider than the Bible. Allow me to be a little light-hearted. The Bible only contains 66 books. John wrote, "Now

there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25). That’s a lot more than just 66 books!

What does the Bible Call itself?

When Jesus or Peter or Paul referred to the Old Testament, did they call it the “Word of God”? Or the Bible? Or the Old Testament? We actually find that they used 3 words, corresponding to the 3 divisions of the Hebrew Old Testament:

- The Law (νομος, תּוֹרָה - Torah). This word meant the first 5 books of the Bible, also called the Books of Moses or the Pentateuch.
- The Prophets (προφეტαι, נְבִיאִים - Neviim). This meant the second part of the Hebrew Bible, namely the historical books and the prophets.
- The Writings or Scriptures (γραφαί, כְּתוּבִים - Ktuvim). These were the remaining books, which included the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ezra, Nehemiah etc. This word Scripture (γραφαί) occurs 31 times in the New Testament and is also the standard way of referring to the Old Testament as a whole.

The following quotations illustrate this:

Jesus said, “**You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life**” (John 5:39). He did not say “You search the word of God”; he said, “**You search the Scriptures**”.

“**Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets**” (Matt 5:17). Jesus used this phrase several times.

Paul wrote to Timothy, “**All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness**” (2 Tim 3:16). Paul did not call the Scriptures “the word of God”.

“**They received the word with all eagerness, daily examining the scriptures whether these things were so**” (Acts 17:11). Interestingly here, **the word** and **the scriptures** occur in the same verse, showing clearly that they do not mean the same thing.

To summarise: the Bible refers to itself as **the scriptures** or in part **the law** or **the prophets**, but it does not call itself **the word of God**. In its pages that phrase has a different meaning, which we are about to consider. The Bible does regard itself as verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit and having absolute divine authority, and let me stress that I am not in any way questioning those truths.

writings, which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Timothy, to whom Paul was written, was the third generation in a godly family. Paul speaks of the sincere faith of his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Perhaps it was these two who faithfully taught him from the scriptures and so prepared his mind first for salvation and subsequently for the wide ministry he was to receive. Timothy became a constant companion of Paul. Six of Paul’s letters have Timothy’s name as co-writer. Some people believe that Timothy wrote the letter to the Hebrews. He became a significant leader in the early church, and carried on Paul’s work in Ephesus.

We see interesting parallels in the prophet Jeremiah. His father, Hilkiyah the priest, was the man who found a book of the law in Josiah’s day. Both Jeremiah and Timothy were called to minister in their youth. Perhaps the link between them is scripture-loving parents who taught them from childhood. Moses, by contrast, grew up in a palace with “**all the wisdom of the Egyptians**”. He had to spend forty years in the wilderness before he began his ministry at the age of eighty!

I believe then that Christian parents should teach their children from the scriptures. They must learn the law of God. The scriptures will not save them, but will give them the wisdom that leads to salvation. Paul elsewhere stated that “**the law is a guardian to bring us to Christ**”.

I do not want to imply that training in righteousness is only for children. People who are spiritual children also need teaching until they have become spiritually mature .

Head or Heart?

Some people pray, “Lord I understand in my head; please move it all down into my heart”. That is the reverse of God’s way. Paul wrote to the Colossians, “**Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you ...**” (3:16) and to the Ephesians “**... that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith**” (3:17). That will happen if we receive his word from faithful ministers who have been taught by him, and then learn to commune with our Heavenly Father. As his word increasingly dwells in our hearts, the scriptures will begin to open up to us, and our minds will receive understanding. Jesus communed with his Father from childhood. When he was twelve, the teachers in the temple were amazed at his understanding. We must turn to God if we want to understand the Bible, not turn to the Bible if we want to understand God. You will never understand the book if you do not have the mind of its author.

committed to him.

Our verses here tell us of four uses of the Scriptures, which we will now consider in turn.

1. The Scriptures are profitable for **teaching**. Timothy's task was not to teach the Bible. The Pharisees were well able to do that. Rather it was to impart a revelation and understanding of God to those under his care. He should use the Scriptures as a medium through which he could communicate spiritual truth. If God calls you or me to share with others what we have received from him, then the Bible is a language in which we can do it.

The letter to the Hebrews clearly illustrates the use of Scripture for teaching. The writer takes passage after passage and person after person from the Old Testament to illustrate the superiority of the new covenant to the old, and the position of Jesus far above all others. Paul also makes extensive use of the scriptures in Romans and Galatians to illustrate and prove the revelations he had received from God. As far as we know, Jesus only used the scriptures in this way when he opened them up to two disciples on the Emmaus road after his resurrection.

2. The Scriptures are profitable for **reproof**. We see this most clearly illustrated when Jesus met Satan in the wilderness. He met and countered each temptation with a quotation from the Old Testament. The Scriptures by their nature are written and immutable and can therefore constitute a court of appeal. Satan could question whether Jesus was the Son of God, and whether he was led by the Holy Spirit. He could not argue with what was written.

3. The Scriptures are also profitable for **correction**. When Jesus corrected the erroneous ideas of his opponents, he frequently used the Scriptures. He quoted David to correct the Pharisaic strictness on the Sabbath. He showed the Sadducees from the Old Testament that resurrection took place. Paul's letter to the Galatians is similarly a letter of correction. He establishes justification by faith by the example of Abraham. As with **reproof**, the Scriptures give a solid legal ground to correction. Special leadings and revelations will and must always be open to question. The Scriptures provide a fixed objective standard against which they can be tested.

4. The Scriptures are profitable for **child training in righteousness**. The Greek word here used is παιδεία - paideia an abstract noun from the word παις - pais (meaning a child), and its primary meaning is child training. The verse before those we are considering reads: "from childhood you have known the sacred

What is the Word of God?

If the *Word of God* does not mean the Bible, what does it mean?

The New Testament has 3 Greek words, λογος (logos), ῥημα (rhema), επος (epos) all of which are most often translated by the English word **word**. Λογος is much the most common, occurring 316 times; ῥημα occurs 67 times and επος only once. Some people teach that λογος means the written word (the Bible!) and that ῥημα is when God speaks directly. This teaching has no foundation in Scripture. As I've said the Bible never uses either λογος or ῥημα to refer to itself. The difference in meaning between λογος and ῥημα is not great. Both are used to translate the same Hebrew word דבר (devar), and sometimes, as when Gabriel brought God's message to Mary, they are used interchangeably in the same passage. Their difference has little effect on this discussion. However, when quoting verses, I will put λογος or ῥημα in brackets to show which is being used.

So what does the **Word of God** mean? The root meaning of **word** (λογος) is something spoken or thought. The **Word of God** is a message or communication from God to man.

The greatest and most important **word** that God has ever spoken to man is his Son Jesus Christ. And so we read, "The Word (λογος) became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." Revelation 19:13 gives Jesus the same title: "His name is called the Word (λογος) of God". Hebrews 1:1 and 11:3 have the same implication: "God ... in these last days has spoken to us by his Son ... through whom also he made the world"; "By faith we understand that the world was prepared by the word (ῥημα) of God". Jesus is the supreme manifestation of the word of God. All other manifestations of that word relate to him.

Jesus is a special meaning of the **Word of God**. The more common meaning is anything that God said *to* anyone or *through* anyone. Quite simply, when God speaks to or through man, it is *the word of God*.

In the Old Testament God spoke to and through the prophets. We frequently find such statements as "the word of the Lord came to Moses", "the word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi" or "the words of Amos which he saw concerning Israel". Similarly, in the New Testament we read, "The word of God came to John in the wilderness". We also find that *the word of God* frequently refers to the gospel. Acts 8: 14 says, "Samaria had received *the word of God*". Clearly this was the gospel.

When God speaks, it is the word of God. In the Old Testament God spoke directly to the prophets. He spoke to others through them. He also spoke through events in the lives of individuals and the nation. This state of affairs continued essentially until Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out upon all flesh. The circle of those to whom he wants to speak directly is extended to all who believe. No longer is it only the few prophets and leaders, but it is the common man.

When Satan quoted scripture to Jesus in the wilderness, it was **not** the word of God. It was the word of Satan. When scripture is quoted today, it is sometimes the word of God to those who hear it. Sometimes it is just the word of man, and sometimes even the word of Satan.

Believing that God wants to use a book as his primary method of communication is contrary not only to scripture, but also to nature and reason. Writing is generally a bad way of communicating, as it is static and inflexible. For most purposes speaking is much better, and I should think 90% of human communication is done that way. Writing is only better when you want a permanent record. It combats the failing of human memory and removes grounds for argument.

Several further factors confirm the Bible is not God's primary method of communication. Only a minority of the human race, and not even all Christians, own Bibles. Before the last century's great increase in literacy the number was much smaller. Before the invention of printing and the reformation, privately owned Bibles were unimagined and all Bibles were in Latin anyway. Even for the privileged few that own Bibles today there are further problems. Our Bibles are not the original inspired words, but fallible translations. Even the best scholar cannot begin to know an ancient language as well as a child speaks its native tongue, because he has only a fraction of the study material. The scholar has a limited number of ancient manuscripts, while the child is surrounded by a ceaseless flow of speech. Even if scholars knew Greek and Hebrew as well as we know English, it is still impossible to translate exactly from one language to another. God has placed limitations on the wonderful book he has given us because he has something better and greater.

Let me stress again, God's normal way of speaking to man is directly through the Holy Spirit to those who have ears to hear, and then through *them* to others.

When apostles and prophets in Scripture spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God was speaking through them. What they said was the word of God to their hearers. When a man or woman today speaks under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that also is the word of God for whomsoever he intends it. When God speaks a message directly to our hearts by the Holy Spirit, that also is his word.

Wrongly Interpreted Verses

We will now look at eight out of many Bible verses that refer to the *word of God*. Millions of people automatically assume these verses refer to the Bible. The context often plainly shows they don't. Some of these verses refer to Jesus; others refer to the Holy Spirit. Yet others refer to the gospel. People are thus putting the Bible in the place of Jesus or the Holy Spirit. This breaches the first commandment!

Old Covenant or New Covenant?

Two Bible verses appear to give us clear instructions on our attitude to the Scriptures:

- This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success (Josh 1:8).
- Blessed is the man ... whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water ... (Ps 1:1-3)

In my younger days I took these verses very seriously and believed as I was taught that they were the recipe for a successful spiritual life. However, I had not yet understood the words of Jeremiah: "Days are coming," says the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah ... this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," says the LORD, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it" (Jer 31:31,33).

The above two Bible passages describe the situation under the Old Covenant. In it, the law was written physically first on tablets of stone and then on parchments. No such instructions to study the Scriptures appear anywhere in the New Testament. In the [New Covenant](#) we have something much better: the law of God is written inwardly in our hearts.

The Scriptures

Having considered the place and function of the Word of God in our lives, we must now think about the place of the Scriptures. Paul sums up this subject in his second letter to Timothy: "All scripture (writings) inspired by God is profitable for **teaching**, for **reproof**, for **correction** and for (child) **training in righteousness**, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (3: 16, 17). These verses deserve more careful consideration than they usually receive. Paul here views the scriptures as a toolbox for the man of God. They are part of his equipment for his ministry to others. Significantly, Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, an individual leader, rather than to a whole church. Nowhere did he exhort believers generally to study the scriptures, though he often exhorted them to pray. Timothy had the task of ministering to others and his knowledge of the scriptures would have been of great benefit in the work

“Preach the word (λογος)” (2 Tim 4: 2)

Paul wrote these words to Timothy. Was he instructing Timothy to preach the scriptures, as many of us were taught? Jesus told his disciples to **“preach the gospel”** (Mark 16:15). It would be surprising if Paul were giving a different instruction to Timothy. The obvious conclusion is that the word was the gospel.

A preacher must have a message from God. Otherwise his preaching will have little or no value. He must speak in the power of the Holy Spirit. That is very different from simply passing on the contents of the Bible.

“Let the word (λογος) of Christ dwell in you richly with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” (Col 3:16)

Read the Bible and fill your mind with the Scriptures, we were taught, and then the word of Christ will dwell in you richly. But the Colossians didn't have Bibles to read; so what did Paul mean? He wrote almost the same words to the Ephesians. **“Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs”** (Eph 5: 18, 19). To the Colossians he wrote, **“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly”**. To the Ephesians he wrote, **“Be filled with the Spirit”**. Otherwise these verses are the same. So, **“The word of Christ dwelling in you richly”** is the same as **“Being filled with the Spirit”**. It is not the same as learning hundreds of Bible verses.

Idolatry

It is enlightening to compare the Catholic attitude to Mary with the Protestant attitude to the Bible. Mary had a unique and wonderful place and privilege in God's plan of salvation. Through her Jesus came into the world and in a sense without her he could never have come in the flesh. However, to place her beside Jesus and worship her and look to her for mediation is idolatry. These things belong only to Jesus. The Bible also is unique among books and definitely above them in a way that Mary was not above other women. However, the fact remains that if we take the titles and place of Jesus and ascribe them to the Bible we are equally guilty of idolatry. As with any other form of idolatry, this will be a block to our spiritual growth and progress. We must discover the place and purpose of the Scriptures in God's plan and use them rightly if we want to walk in the truth and grow in God.

“The word (λογος) of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword” (Heb 4:12)

We must give special attention to this verse. Millions of people believe and teach that it refers to the Bible. Often they use the KJV translation – **“The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword”**. They tell us that the Bible is alive and powerful. But there is nothing in this chapter or anywhere else in Hebrews that indicates this verse refers to the Scriptures. In fact, in New Testament times, the New Testament did not exist!

Let us look at these words in their context. The opening words of Hebrews are, **“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son”**. God **spoke!** And what he spoke was his word. At the beginning of chapter 4 we read. **“The gospel was preached to us, just as to them, but the word they heard did not benefit them”** (v2). This suggests that the **word** in verse 12 refers to both the preaching of the prophets and the preaching of the gospel. In fact, Paul actually wrote: **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes”** (Rom 1:16). It is prophetic preaching and the gospel that are **“living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword”**.

Is the Bible living and active? The answer is yes, when God speaks through it. He can and frequently does speak through verses and passages of the Bible. But the Bible is not in itself automatically living or active. Many people read it or hear it read daily or weekly and their lives are not changed. Whole groups and denominations that claim to base themselves on the scriptures are without life and without power. Paul, referring to the Scriptures, wrote, **“The letter kills, but the spirit gives life”**.

People sometimes say, **“The Bible became alive to me”**, or **“God quickened this verse to me”**. Exactly! The Bible was dead till God spoke through it and brought it to life. Then it became alive.

When Peter or Paul preached the gospel their words were living and active and brought dynamic changes in the lives of their hearers. When you or I receive or speak a word from God, that also will be living and active.

“The sword of the Spirit, which is the word (ρημα) of God” (Eph 6:17)

Paul describes the sword of the spirit here as part of the spiritual armour. On the basis of this verse, some people believe you should always carry a Bible with you as your spiritual weapon. Others feel that texts written up all over their house will help to protect them from the powers of evil. But was Paul referring to the Bible? When his letter arrived in Ephesus with the morning post, do you think they hurried down to the Christian bookshop to get copies of the New Testament

so that they would have their swords? I doubt it! You might find a Torah Scroll in Jerusalem, but the Roman, Corinthian, Galatian, Ephesian and other gentile believers simply had no Bibles! The word of God, like the other items of spiritual armour (truth, righteousness, faith etc), was in their hearts. Jesus, the Word of God, was in their hearts. God had written his law in their hearts.

The real sword of the spirit is not the Bible in our pockets; it is the word of God in our hearts and mouths.

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word (ῥῆμα) of God (Rom 10:17)

Many people take this verse to mean that reading the Bible will give them faith. But look back a few verses and it is clear that Paul is talking about the gospel rather than the Scriptures. **“How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?”** (Rom 10:14). Throughout Scripture people believed when God spoke to them; either directly as with Abraham, Moses and many other Old Testament saints; or through the preaching of the gospel.

Faith can and will come when God speaks to us and we hear his voice. God can of course speak through the Bible; but he also speaks in many other ways, and reading the Bible will never automatically create faith.

“Man will not live by bread alone, but by every word (ῥῆμα) that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Mat 4:4)

Primarily this verse applies to Jesus. It harmonises perfectly with his own words, **“I am the bread of life ... I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live ...”** and **“Give us this day our daily bread”**. Jesus is the spiritual food on which we live. When God speaks to us we receive life. **“He that has the Son has the life; he that does not have the Son does not have the life”** (1 John 5:12).

A popular series of Bible-reading notes here in UK is entitled “Daily Bread”. This title implies that the Bible is our spiritual food. This thinking is the logical development of calling the Bible the Word of God. Many people, alas, read the Bible faithfully every day, but are not fed, because they have never learnt to feed on Jesus. He himself said, **“You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of me; and you will not come to me, that you may have life”** (John 5: 39, 40). The Pharisees were great readers and teachers of the Bible, but when Jesus said, **“Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you”**, they were bitterly offended. To read and study the Bible is good. To put the Bible in the place of Jesus is idolatry.

Secondarily this verse applies to any word spoken under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Those who hear are fed, and their food has been the word of God.

Food is vital for growth. God has provided the five ministries described in Ephesians 4 for the building up of the body of Christ. A spiritual child needs apostles, prophets, shepherds, teachers and evangelists to feed him with the word of God and build him up to maturity. However, as with a child in the natural, there should be a progression from milk to solid food through to the time when he becomes mature and is able to feed himself.

“My word (ῥῆμα in LXX) ... will not return to me empty, but it will accomplish that which I please ...” (Isaiah 55:11)

This verse was wonderfully fulfilled in Jesus. He left the Father’s presence to take the form of man and suffer and die and rise again. He did not return empty-handed to the Father, but brought with him a great multitude of brethren. He accomplished every purpose for which God had sent him.

When a man or woman today speaks the word of God, we may be sure that the words will not be in vain, but will accomplish the purposes of God. A few faithful servants who are able to speak the word of God will accomplish far more than an army of good people who only know how to distribute Bibles and Christian literature. Such work is good, but to speak the word of God is of an altogether higher order.

“Born again ... by the word (λογος) of God which lives and abides for ever” (1 Pet 1: 23)

Does this verse refer to the Bible? No! Because 2 verses later we read **“but the word (ῥῆμα) of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word (ῥῆμα) that was preached as the gospel to you”**. Again the word of God clearly refers to the gospel.

A few people are born again directly through reading the Scriptures, but normally God uses a human messenger. The Ethiopian eunuch was puzzling over a prophecy from Isaiah - reading the Bible and not understanding it - when the Holy Spirit sent Philip to him. Philip **“preached Jesus to him”**, and he believed.

When Gabriel spoke the word of God to Mary, Jesus was born in her. The new birth takes place when Jesus, the Word of God, is born in us. People are born again through Jesus the Word of God and through the Holy Spirit. They are not born again through the Bible.