

It's been two days now and my muscles still ache from shoveling over a foot of snow off the driveway and sidewalks. The media has dubbed it the blizzard of 2005 – a heavy, wet Spring snowstorm in the Rockies. Just two days earlier I mowed my lawn for the first time since last Fall and musingly made a remark to my neighbor that I was officially calling an end to winter. As I paused in the midst of shoveling, the foolishness of my comment echoed loudly in my mind and my soreness is a humbling reminder that man should not be so presumptuous as to think he can declare an end to that which only God controls (cf. Job 38:22).

The weather had been quite warm and spring-like for a couple of weeks prior to that blizzard and folks were getting anxious to work in their yards. Likewise, the morning after it quit snowing, the sun wasted no time in taking the chilly bite off the air and the temperature rose to a satisfying state of lukewarmness. It occurred to me just how much this whole scenario mirrors the spiritual lives of Christians.

Several passages in the New Testament would support the fact that Christians often start out well in their zeal and excitement for the Lord's work, only to later chill down to a satisfied state of lukewarmness. The Galatians "*ran well*" (Galatians 5:7) but teachers preaching a "*different gospel*" (1:6) had taken some of the wind out of their sails, putting their salvation in danger (Galatians 3:1-5; 5:1-6). The Corinthians came up "*short in no [spiritual] gifts*" (1 Corinthians 1:7), yet their one time fervor soon was cooled by a return to their carnal affections (2 Corinthians 6:12). Certainly, the classic case in point is the Laodicean Christians whose lukewarm state was so nauseating to the Lord that He commanded them to "*be zealous and repent*" (Revelation 3:14-19).

A truth that sometimes escapes Christians (preachers included) is that our faith can experience a cooling off period where a notion of satisfaction creeps over us and we get to feeling content where we are rather than where God wants us to be. What's the solution? There is only one. It is the same one that it has always been. We must regularly challenge ourselves with the question: **Am I being governed more and more by God's word?** Let us look one more time at the text of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 to be reminded of its teaching. "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"

The purpose of the word is to teach, rebuke, correct, and instruct (or train). God's design behind giving us His Word is so that we may be "trained in righteousness" in order to be thoroughly equipped, mature Christians. The Word of God "applied" is the only thing that can make us complete. It is imperative that we recognize that any spiritual incompleteness in us is due to the absence of the Word of God governing our life. This of course does not simply mean we need to be familiar with what the Word teaches, or be in agreement with its counsel. What it means is that to be prepared for our eternal home with the Father our lives must be governed by His Word now.

The Bible clearly states that "sin separates us from God" (Isaiah 59:2) and affirms that everyone will stand responsible before God for their own sins (Ezekiel 18:20-21). While these facts are true about sin, God's Word doesn't help us simply because we acknowledge these truths, or for that matter, preach

them to others (Romans 2:17-24). The only thing that matters is if we submit our hearts to the governing power of the Word. Two biblical characters provide the prototype for us. In Genesis 39 we find the account of Potiphar's wife trying to seduce Joseph. His response – *"How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"* evidences the fact that Joseph lived under the governing power God's training in righteousness.

Likewise David's review of his past sins brought him deep, penetrating sorrow and grief (Psalm 32:3-5; 51:3-12). It is the agonizing cries of a desperate man's awareness of how terrible sin is in Psalm 51:4 – *"Against You, You only have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight"*. One might conclude that Joseph's "training in righteousness" was of greater value than David's because it kept him from sinning. Yet, David declares, *"I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin"* (Psalm 32:5). Was David not allowing his life to be governed by God's Word when he did this? Absolutely he was! The text goes on to say, *"For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You in a time when You may be found . . . . Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him"* (Psalm 32:6,10). That is why David was a *"man after God's own heart"*.

Being governed by God's Word does not simply mean that one evidences a superior level of sinlessness above others. It means that one is given over to trust ALL that God says is true. That is exactly the message contained in the words of 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The purpose of God's Word is to teach, rebuke, correct, and instruct in righteousness. If God's Word teaches me truth and I subscribe to it in my actions, His Word is governing me. If the Word rebukes my sin and I penitently accept that rebuke, I have allowed myself to be governed by God's Word. If Scripture corrects me and seeks to restore me back from where I have stumbled and I humbly respond, God is the governing force in my life. And when the Word seeks to instruct and train me in godliness and I willingly respond like a little child, I can know that God's Word is managing my life. Furthermore, it is the word of God that provides us with hope. The Scriptures assure us that it is the goodness of God that leads man to repentance (Romans 2:4). Not only does His Word create a desire in us to be accepted by Him, but it likewise gives us confident hope that we can expect to obtain exactly what He has promised. Surely we ought to immerse ourselves in it so that we never lose sight of what is so important to our eternal destiny.

Hebrews 4:12 tells us God's Word *"is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* The Word is God's manner of convicting and nourishing hearts, as well as a tool to cut through the deepest of beliefs and false motives. Might we not ask ourselves: Have I gotten to the point where the Word no longer does this to me? Do I only read the Word in order to criticize the faults in others? Perhaps we all know brethren who attempt to hold others to a higher standard of righteousness than they are willing to accept for themselves. Jesus told the Pharisees He will have none of it (Matthew 23:3, 12, 14, 25-28).

How do we see our lives on this earth? Are we so locked in to all that we can do, buy, see, experience that we are exchanging our very souls for these things? Have we spent numerous years in a dormant state – never blooming with passion – never pollinating anyone else with our faith in Jesus Christ?

How many years of our lives may it be said that we are truly mature Christians? My guess – relatively few. But do we live those years with passion for the Lord's will, or with lukewarm satisfaction?

One of the best ways to examine ourselves and measure our spiritual maturity is by our relationship to the Word and how much time we spend with it.