

Sunday, May 14, 2017

“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 perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

We have said from the pulpit on several occasions that it is important for people to be reading the Bible, studying the Bible, meditating on the Bible, etc., on their own. Lest some people think that this is just a friendly suggestion that you can optionally take or leave, I would like to make it clear that this is a necessity and a requirement for anyone who is professing to believe in Christ. Nobody can lay up the words of God in your heart for you – nobody can meditate on them for you – this is something you must do for yourself. And it’s something that you must do daily.

This room is full of people who have made a public profession of faith. We are convinced in our own hearts that this scripture that we have is the very word of God. We believe that the same God who said “let there be light” has commanded the light to shine in our hearts:

“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:3-6).

But how many of us, truly, can say that our delight is in the law of the Lord, and that that we meditate in it day and night (Psalm 1:2)? Do you really do that? Do you, like the Bereans, receive the word with all readiness of mind, and search the scriptures daily (Acts 17:11)? Or are other things more important?

There are probably a lot of people sitting here who ought to be ashamed for their lack of diligence in this matter. So I pray that you’ll listen today, and you’ll go out with a renewed sense of zeal and actually do something about it. I get the impression that from time to time, people might be convicted in their heart during a sermon, and then walk out the door and immediately forget what manner of man they were. You don’t want to be a hearer and not a doer:

“For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway

forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.” (James 1:23-25)

Some people might actually make it out the door and behold themselves in the glass a little bit longer than others, before they straightway forget what manner of man they were. They might make some changes for a few weeks, and then go right back to how it was before. So understand, this has to be a lifelong, habitual thing.

The importance of the scripture cannot be overstated. God has magnified His word above all His name (Psalm 138:2). On that passage, Philpot says:

“This is one of those expressions of Scripture that seem so comprehensive, and yet so amazing. To my mind it is one of the most remarkable expressions in the whole book of God. ‘Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.’ The name of God includes all the perfections of God; everything that God is, and which God has revealed himself as having -- his justice, majesty, holiness, greatness, and glory, and whatever he is in himself, that is God's name. And yet he has ‘magnified’ something ‘above his name’ -- his word -- his truth. This may refer to the Incarnate Word, the Son of God, who was called ‘the Word.’ ‘There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one’: 1 John 5:7, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God’: John 1:1. You may take the words either as meaning that God has magnified his Word, his eternal Son -- above all his great name, that is, he has set Jesus on high above all the other perfections of his majesty; or take it as meaning his written word, which is written in the sacred Scriptures. So, in that case, not only the Incarnate Word in the person of Jesus; but also the written word in the Scriptures of truth. He has magnified it above all his name in the fulfilment of it: God's faithfulness being so dear to him, he has exalted his faithfulness above all his other perfections. We see this in nature. Here is a man so to be depended upon, so faithful to his word, that he will sacrifice anything sooner than depart from it: that man will give up his property, or life itself, rather than forfeit his word. So God has spoken of magnifying his word above all his name. He would sooner allow all his other perfections to come to naught, than for his faithfulness to fail. He has so magnified his faithfulness, that his love, his mercy, his grace, would all sooner fail than his faithfulness -- the word of his mouth and what he has revealed in the Scripture. What a firm salvation, then, is ours, which rests upon his word, when God has magnified that word above all his name! What volumes of blessedness and truth are contained therein! so that, if God has revealed his truth to your soul, and given you faith to anchor in the word of promise, sooner than that should fail, he would suffer the loss of all; for he has magnified his word above all his name.”

So, first we're going to go over a few characteristics of the scripture, and why we should be reading it. And then finish up with how we should be reading it.

It is God-breathed

In today's passage from 2 Timothy, Paul tells us that all scripture is given by inspiration of God. That phrase "given by inspiration of God" is actually one Greek word: theopneustos. It comes from "theos" (which means "God") and a derivative of "pneo" (which means "to breathe, to blow," and from which we also get the word "spirit"). It's the only time the word appears in the Bible. It means "God-breathed." The scripture is the very breath of God, inspired by the Spirit of God. In another place, it's described like this:

"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*" (2 Peter 1:19-21)

We frequently have people mockingly ask us, "when did you last talk to God?" or "how do you know what God thinks?" Well, I know what He thinks because I know how to read. I know the revealed mind of God, because He revealed it to us. And I want to know as much about it as I can, and think about it, and talk about it, and get to the bottom of it to whatever degree I can pursuant to the amount of light that God has given on it. It isn't always easy – there are "some things hard to be understood" (2 Peter 3:16). But it's a good and necessary work.

It is profitable for doctrine

The word "doctrine" is from the Greek word "didaskalia," which comes from the word "didasko" which we just so happen to have learned about in last week's sermon, which I'm sure you all recall means "to cause to learn; to discharge the office of a teacher; to hold discourse with others in order to instruct them; to explain or expound; to instill doctrine." The "doctrine" is the thing which is taught. When we read the Bible, we are being taught by God. When we talk about the doctrine of election, for example, we're talking about whatever the Bible teaches us about election. Whatever God has decided to reveal on a particular matter, you'll find it in the Bible.

Without becoming thoroughly acquainted with the doctrines of the Bible and having a good, solid knowledge of them, there is a great danger that you will be carried about with every new doctrine that presents itself. And there are plenty of strange doctrines to go around.

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” (Ephesians 4:14)

“Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.” (Hebrews 13:9)

If you don't have a foundational knowledge of the doctrines of the Bible, how are you going to exhort and convince the gainsayers?

“Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” (Titus 1:9)

Of course, this verse is in the context of describing the qualifications of an elder, but the concept applies to everyone in the church. It's everyone's duty to exhort one another (e.g., Hebrews 3:13) and to reprove (e.g., Ephesians 5:11). Exhortation is beseeching one another to do right, and the word also means “to comfort.” When it comes time to exhort or comfort a brother or sister, if you can't pull out some good, pure, wholesome doctrine, you are absolutely worthless in that matter. And if you can't do the same to rebuke or convince a gainsayer (that is, a person who is resisting the truth), you are of no help whatsoever in that situation. You can't go around saying you believe the Bible if you don't know what's in the Bible, and you can't know what's in the Bible unless you spend time searching the scripture.

It is profitable for reproof

Interestingly enough, this word translated “reproof” in 2 Timothy 3:16 is translated as “evidence” in Hebrews 11:1 (“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”). In the passage before us (2 Timothy 3:16), this word is talking about proof or evidence to convince of some error or guilt or sin. Through the scripture, God convicts people of their sins and destroys any heresy.

“For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12)

This is a wonderful verse. The word of God is quick (alive). It is powerful (effectual, active, energetic). It pierces down to the innermost and most hidden thoughts, feelings, desires, intentions. Nothing is so strong or hidden that it can't reach it, uncover it, and expose it. The word of God exposes you for what you really are. It shows you your true character. It is two-edged – one side condemns, the other converts. This is why those who preach the word of

God are a savour of death to those who are perishing, and a savour of life to those who are saved (2 Corinthians 2:15-16). Nobody can argue with the fact that when some truth is spoken about your innermost thoughts and intentions, that has a profound effect. Who hasn't experienced what that feels like? You will be reading in the scripture, and you'll come across a passage that, with great precision, will cut through all of your façade, right to the heart of the matter. Wicked men will run and hide, or rebel and fight against that. Righteous men will run to it as our only source of comfort, to know what God requires of us.

It is profitable for correction

The word "correction" here in 2 Timothy 3:16 means "restoration to an upright or right state." A version of this word is used when Jesus healed a woman who had been "bowed together" for eighteen years. "He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God." (Luke 13:11-13). Not only does the scripture teach us about sin and convince us of our sins, it is the means by which people are recovered out of their sins. Any restoration of a person that is not based on the scripture is doomed to failure.

"Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." (James 1:21)

It says that this word is able to save your souls, that is, it is the means by which you are saved. It is supernaturally implanted or engrafted in your heart. Barnes says: *"The meaning here is, that we should allow the principles of the gospel to be thus engrafted on our nature; that however crabbed or perverse our nature may be, or however bitter and vile the fruits which it might bring forth of its own accord, it might, through the engrafted word, produce the fruits of righteousness."*

A similar passage is this one:

**"But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned *them*; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."
(2 Timothy 3:14-15)**

This wisdom comes only from the holy scripture. You're not going to find it anywhere else. But it only comes with power to those whose hearts have been softened by God. When the rich man begged for Lazarus to come back from the dead to warn his brothers, here is the conversation that happened:

“Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” (Luke 16:27-31)

You don't need to wait around for some miraculous sign to happen. It's all right there in the words. They make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

It is profitable for instruction in righteousness

That is, it teaches us what is right and holy. It teaches us the requirements of God to live a holy life, and what our duties are to God and man. This word “instruction” here is the same Greek word which is translated as “nurture” when talking about a father’s duties to his children, to “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). And it is translated “chastening” when talking about God chastening His sons in Hebrews 12. The sense of the word is that it is talking about the different methods of instruction employed to teach a child of God how to live righteously.

Furthermore, it doesn't just give us some instruction in righteousness – it provides us all the instruction that we need, such that it is not deficient in the least. Regardless of the situation that the man of God finds himself in, there is no lack of instruction and guidance for him in the scripture. He is provided everything he needs to be perfect (or, complete). And he is thoroughly and perfectly furnished unto all good works, that is, he has exactly what he needs to perform all good works. (Note: that doesn't mean that he's actually going to follow all of the instruction given, which is why God deals with us through chastening and other instructive methods). He can never become so advanced in knowledge or holiness that he needs more than the scripture; on the contrary, he can spend a lifetime with that holy guide and just barely scratch the surface, as it were. The more he mines for precious gems of truth, the more he realizes how broad and deep the mine is. And anyone who goes beyond it has gone too far:

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, *it is because there is no light in them.*” (Isaiah 8:20)

Jesus Christ is the Word

**“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”
(John 1:1)**

“And he *was* clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.” (Revelation 19:13)

The Greek word is “logos.” In every word that He said, in every word that He inspired to be said, and in everything that He did, Jesus Christ was the embodiment of the perfections and will and mind of God. If you want to know what someone is thinking, you listen to their words. That’s why He is called the Word – if you want to know what God’s thoughts are (His standards, His doctrines, His revealed will), you look to Christ. You look to His words (including every word that He, as God, inspired) and His deeds. He is elsewhere called “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15) and “the express image of his person” (Hebrews 1:3).

And where else are you going to look to Jesus Christ other than in all the scripture? The whole Bible points to Him. If you want to summarize what the entire scripture is about in a single word, you could say “Christ.”

“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.” (John 5:39)

He came to earth not to do away with those Old Testament scriptures, but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17), and to declare God more perfectly.

“For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” (John 1:17-18)

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;” (Hebrews 1:1-2)

If you have the incarnate Word of God speaking to you, you better make it a priority to listen to Him.

So, I’ve talked about some of the reasons why the Bible is an important thing for you to be giving your attention to. For a lot of other reasons, I suggest you read Psalm 119. Now let’s move on to how you should be reading it.

It must be read spiritually

“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and *they* are life.” (John 6:63)

“Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” (1 Corinthians 2:13)

You don't read the Bible just to go through the motions of reading it. And it shouldn't simply be an academic pursuit. It's very easy to fall into either of these traps. You might have a habit where you read the Bible every day. If you're not careful, it can become a rote, fleshly, empty activity that you're doing just for show. Likewise, you might be an academic type of person where you like to learn new things. The Bible might be interesting to you because of that. You might be able to win Bible trivia games, and you might think that you're really impressing everyone with your vast knowledge. But if there's no spiritual edification that you're getting from it, you're no better than the Athenians who “spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21).

Note that I'm not saying you shouldn't have a habit where you're reading the Bible every day (you should). And I'm not saying you shouldn't be interested in it and try to learn everything you can (you should). What I am saying is that if you go about it with the wrong spirit, then you're sinning.

You should be asking questions like “How can I apply what I'm reading to my current situation? Is there something I'm not doing or thinking that I ought to be doing or thinking? Something that I am doing or thinking that I need to stop doing or thinking?”

It must be read daily

Not when you have time. Not when you get around to it. Not as an afterthought. But as an integral part of your day, every day.

“Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates.” (Deuteronomy 11:18-20)

**“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”
(Acts 17:11)**

“O how love I thy law! it *is* my meditation all the day.” (Psalm 119:97)

It must be studied and meditated upon

Your attitude should be like that of Ezra, where you're going to prepare your heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach it to others (Ezra 7:10).

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

Study here means to make haste, give diligence, labor, etc. You do it to be approved unto God – not to impress men; otherwise you'll be ashamed. “Rightly dividing” means to “cut straight.” It means to get in there and dissect the word of truth, open it up, search for every gem of truth that you can find, and portion it out appropriately, meaning that you give the appropriate scripture for the appropriate circumstances. If you're at a so called “gay pride” parade, for example, that's probably not the time to preach about the nuances of the virgin birth.

A necessary part of this is to compare spiritual things with spiritual (1 Corinthians 2:13). If you don't look at all the scripture, and compare scripture to scripture, and get the sense and spirit of it, you can come up with some really strange doctrines.

Furthermore, you can't just read it and then walk away. You have to meditate on it. About the blessed man in Psalm 1:

“But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.” (Psalm 1:2)

“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” (Psalm 119:11)

When God was sending Joshua to lead the armies of Israel through the land of Canaan to possess it and divide it up as their inheritance, God didn't give Joshua a pile of Army Field Manuals or a dissertation on military tactics. He gave him the Word of God and said this:

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.” (Joshua 1:8)

When you go out as a soldier of Jesus Christ, your preparation is not with the wisdom of men, but rather meditating day and night on His word.

One of the greatest metaphors for meditating on the word of God is that of eating. You eat it, you chew on it, you digest it, you assimilate it. Only you can do this – you can't rely on someone else. You can't wait around for someone to tell you to do it. Food is what keeps us alive, and gives us strength; so the Word of God nourishes us spiritually and keeps us strong and revived. Without eating it up regularly, you will be spiritually emaciated. While others feed on ashes (Isaiah 44:20), we should be feasting on the Word of God.

“Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts.” (Jeremiah 15:16)

“But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee.” (Ezekiel 2:8)

“And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take *it*, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey.” (Revelation 10:9)

And like eating physical food, we must regularly return to the table. You don't just eat one time – you have to do it over and over. Likewise, we should be regularly reviewing things that we have read and learned in the scripture. Without regular review, you will forget. It's one of the limitations of the flesh. That's why we have Peter and Jude saying stuff like, “I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth” (2 Peter 1:12) and “I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this” (Jude 1:5).

David said, “I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.” (Psalm 119:16). And how could he say he will not forget His word? Because he did everything necessary to make sure he wouldn't. He hid it in his heart, he meditated upon it, he talked about it with his lips, and he did all that daily.

Finally, to close, let me make it clear that this does not mean that you get to sit around and read the Bible and neglect your other duties. The point is not just to hear it and study it; action is required. Otherwise, you have deceived yourself.

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” (James 1:22)

I love you. Amen.