

Scripture: Ephesians 5:1-17 (1Pe 1:17-25; 2Pe 1:16-21)

Subject: *The imperative to discover and obey God's will...*

Complement: *... is best fulfilled by the study of God's Word.*

Big Idea: If, as God's children we are to discover and obey God's will, then we had best become serious students of God's Word.

Key Text: For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light...and find out what pleases the Lord. *Ephesians 5:8, 10*

Introduction

Here are some comments about the Old Testament written by Sunday School students who need to spend more time on their homework:

- In the first book of the Bible, Guinness, the Lord got tired of creating the world, so he took the Sabbath off.
- Adam & Eve were created from an apple tree.
- Noah's wife was called Joan of Ark.
- Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day, but a ball of fire by night.
- Moses led the Hebrews to the Red Sea, where they made unleavened bread, which is bread made without any ingredients.
- Moses went up on Mount Cyanide to get the Ten Amendments.
- The Fifth Commandment is humor thy mother and father.
- The Seventh Commandment is thou shalt not admit adultery.
- Joshua led the Hebrews in the Battle of Geritol.
- David was a Hebrew king skilled at playing the liar. He fought with the Finkelsteins, a race of people who lived in the biblical times.
- Solomon, one of David's sons, has 300 wives and 700 porcupines. (from Mikey's Funnies)

This morning, we ask the question: "Why Should I Read My Bible?" There are four good answers that I would like you to consider:

1. Because the Bible is unique

Eph 5:8, 10

The Bible is unique because it is the written record of God's self-revelation. We would be able to know nothing at all about God, if He hadn't chosen to reveal Himself to us. And God has revealed Himself most completely in the person of Jesus Christ – God's ultimate revelation. And the main way we know about Jesus is through Scripture. John tells us:

³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But **these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ**, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. *John 20:30-31*

The Bible is also unique because God Himself has authored "his story." Paul wrote: "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the [person] of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (2 Timothy 3:16,17). The word for "God-breathed" is often translated as "inspired by God"; but goes far beyond inspiration as we understand it. M.G. Easton describes it this way:

all the "sacred writings," [have been]... "breathed into by God" in such a sense that the writers were **supernaturally guided** to express **exactly what God intended them to express... There are no errors in the Bible** as it came from God, none have been proved to exist. *Difficulties and phenomena we cannot explain are not errors.* All these books of the Old and New Testaments are

inspired. We do not say that they contain, **but that they are, the Word of God**. The gift of inspiration rendered the writers the organs of God, for the infallible communication of his mind and will, in the very manner and words in which it was originally given. ¹

The early church fathers held to this view. Irenaeus (about 130-200 A.D.) said, "The Scriptures are perfect." Likewise, the reformers, for example Martin Luther, spoke of "Scripture which has never erred." There are many today who do not believe in the inspiration of Scripture, and say that the Bible only "contains" God's Word, a heresy which usually winds up with the scholar throwing out anything he doesn't like!

Of course there are difficulties. Even Peter said that some of Paul's letters were "*hard to understand*" (2 Peter 3:16). It is important to remember that the Bible was written over a period of fifteen hundred years by at least forty authors, including kings, scholars, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, historians, and doctors. They wrote different types of literature, such as history, poetry, prophecy, parables, letters and more. R.A. Torrey says:

God Himself is the Author of [the Bible]. But ... the revelation [is] ...to finite beings who are imperfect in intellectual development and consequently in knowledge, and who are also imperfect in character and consequently in spiritual discernment. The wisest man measured on the scale of eternity is only a babe... There must, then, from the very necessities of the case, be difficulties in such a revelation from such a source made to such persons. When the finite try to understand the infinite, there is bound to be difficulty..²

For example, it is hard to reconcile the love of God and the suffering in the world. Yet we confidently affirm our faith in a loving God, and seek to grapple with our understanding of the problem of suffering *within that framework*. In a similar way we need to affirm the divine authorship of the Bible and try to understand the difficulties it presents us *within that context*, and with the Spirit's help. To paraphrase Paul: "*What if some [do] not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar*" (Romans 3:3, 4).

When Billy Graham was a young man several people started to say to him, "You can't believe everything in the Bible." He began to worry about it and become confused. John Pollock, in his biography of Graham, records his words:

... I went back and I got my Bible, and I went out in the moonlight. And I got to a stump and put the Bible on the stump, and I knelt down, and I said, "Oh, God; I cannot prove certain things. I cannot answer some of the questions Chuck [Charles Templeton] is raising and some of the other people are raising, but I accept this Book by faith as the Word of God." I stayed by the stump praying wordlessly, my eyes moist... I had a tremendous sense of God's presence. I had a great peace that the decision I had made was right.'

We should read our Bibles, because it is uniquely the God-breathed, inspired Word of God.

2. Because it is the supreme authority for what we believe / how we act 2Tim 3:16

If we accept that the Bible is inspired by God, then its authority must follow from that. If it is God's Word, then it must be our supreme authority for what we believe and how we act. It certainly was for Jesus. About his mission and the OT Scriptures, Jesus said:

1 Easton, M.G. Easton's Bible Dictionary. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996, c1897.

2 Torrey, R.A. Difficulties in the Bible: Alleged Errors and Contradictions. Willow Grove: Woodlawn Electronic Publishing, 1998, c1996.

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ 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. Matthew 5:17-18

The Bible must be our authority in all matters of faith and conduct. As we have seen, "All Scripture is God-breathed and *is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*" (2 Timothy 3:16). First, it is our authority for what we believe (our creed), and for what we teach. If God wrote it, there's a really good chance that it contains stuff we need to know! In it, He tells us about Himself, about salvation, about His Son; everything we believe and teach comes from Scripture.

Secondly, it is our authority for how we act (our conduct), for "correcting" and for "training in righteousness." It is here that we find out displeases God, and how we can live a righteous life. While it is true that the Bible contains some very difficult and controversial subjects, some things are abundantly clear. It tells us how to conduct our day-to-day lives, how to treat our families, rules for appropriate worship, what things we should be focusing on until the day Christ returns, and so on. Thanks to the Bible, we know that theft is wrong, that sexual intercourse outside marriage is wrong, that lying mightily displeases God. We know it is right to give and to forgive. We are also given, among other things, guidelines on how to bring up our children and to care for the disadvantaged in the world: the poor, orphaned, and marginalized.

Some people say, "I don't want this rule book. It is too restrictive—all those regulations. I want to be free. If you live by the Bible, you are not free to enjoy life." But is that really right? Does the Bible take away our freedom? Or does it in fact give us freedom? We had a goldfish who used to like to every once in awhile jump a bit in his goldfish bowl. I dare say that while it thought that it wanted to be free, if it ever had escaped, it would have found that freedom outside the boundaries set for it were not desirable at all!

Yes, the Bible *is* God's rule book. He tells us what is "in" and what is "out." He tells us what we can do and what we must not do. He does that, because as our Creator, He knows what's good for us, and what isn't. God did not say, "Do not murder" in order to ruin our enjoyment of life. He did not say, "Do not commit adultery" because He is a spoilsport. He did not want people to get hurt. When people commit adultery, lives get messed up. The more we discover His will and put it into practice, the freer we shall be. Why should we read our Bibles? Because it is God's revelation of His will for His people, and it *should be our guide for faith and life*.

3. Because it is has the power to transform us

Matthew 7:24

The Bible is more than a manual for life and living. It has the supernatural ability to *change us*. The whole point of the Bible is to show us how to enter into a relationship with God, through Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures *that testify about me...*" (John 5:39, 40). Dr. Christopher Chavasse, former Bishop of Rochester says:

The Bible is the portrait of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospels are the figure itself in the portrait. The Old Testament is the background leading up to the divine figure, pointing towards it and absolutely necessary to the composition as a whole. The Epistles serve as the dress and accoutrements of the figure, explaining and describing it. Then, while by our Bible reading we study the portrait as a great whole, the miracle happens, the figure comes to life and stepping down from the canvas of the written word, the everlasting Christ of the Emmaus story becomes himself our Bible teacher, to interpret to us in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

The whole point of studying the Bible is to come to know Jesus Christ in a living, vibrant, personal way, and so to come to know the Father. The Bible is not just an ancient book with dead words on flat paper. As Martin Luther put it, "*The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold on me.*"

By reading and studying the Bible we can experience a transforming relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Paul says, "We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, *are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory*, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (II Corinthians 3:18). Studying the Bible brings us into contact with Jesus Christ, as the Holy Spirit who lives within us reveals to us the very mind of our Saviour. As Paul writes:

¹⁴ The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, *because they are spiritually discerned.* ¹⁵ The spiritual man makes judgments about all things... *But we have the mind of Christ.* *1 Corinthians 2:14-16*

Because Scripture is supernaturally authored by God, we can *experience* and hear from the person whom we read about in the pages of the New Testament. And the more time we spend reading and meditating, the more our characters will become more like His, and that's the point. God's plan is for us to be *changed through His Word*. As Paul says

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined **to be conformed to the likeness of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. *Romans 8:28-29*

Spending time in the Word is time spent with Jesus, and the more like Him we will become – if we are obedient! You see, we must put into practice what we hear from God. Jesus said, "*Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock*" (Mat 7:24). As the 19th century preacher D. L. Moody pointed out, "The Bible was not given to increase our knowledge. It was given to change lives."

I remember the summer I turned sixteen. I had somehow convinced my parents to let me go out and live with a friend of mine named Joe Humphrey, who had a farm with about 100-or so wooded acres. We were going to cut trees, have them made into lumber and then sell the lumber to make a profit. I nearly got killed a few times, and didn't make much money, but what did happen is that I began to sound a lot like my friend. He was from the Southern states and had a mild drawl when he talked, and darned if by the end of the summer, I did too! Some of his sayings, his mannerisms, the whole bit! The more time I spent with Joe, the more I became like

him. Drove my parents nuts, but that was just a nice bonus! We should read our Bible because *it has the supernatural power to change us to become more like Christ.*

4. Because it is a supernatural weapon in the battle we wage Eph. 6:12, 17; Heb 4:12

Ephesians makes it clear that we are in a spiritual battle, and the only weapon we are given to fight with is God's word. Jesus showed the example by countering the attack of the devil at the start of His ministry (Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus met every temptation and *misquote* of Scripture with a verse appropriately taken from the Scriptures. The writer of the Book of Hebrews says, "*The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart*" (Hebrews 4:12). It has divine power to pierce any and all defenses, and is able to penetrate to the heart of any action, attitude or excuse we may throw up against God and His will.

Paul reminds us, that God's Word is the only offensive weapon we have in the spiritual battle we are involved in:

³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. *2 Corinthians 10:3-5*

We are in a fight to the finish for the hearts, minds and souls of our generation. We need to read and study God's Word, because it is the only offensive weapon we have in the spiritual battle we fight.

Conclusion

... get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and *humbly accept the word planted in you*, which can save you. *Do not merely listen to the word*, and so deceive yourselves. *Do what it says*. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. *James 1:21-25*

Have any of you ever bought a new piece of electronic equipment, taken a course online or at college, tried to teach yourself a new musical instrument? You know that you have to do a lot of reading. We do not begrudge the time to read these documents to try and figure things out, why should we be less willing to devote less time to reading God's Word, there to discover His will for our lives?

Why should we read our Bibles? Because the Bible is unique; because it is the supreme authority for what we believe / how we act; because it has the power to transform us; because it is a supernaturally powerful weapon in the battle for the hearts and minds of our world.

If you are not part of a study, join one. If you aren't reading start. You won't be the same. I promise. So does God's Word!

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