

WHY STUDY THE BIBLE? **by Monty Sholund**

It may seem a little impertinent even to ask such a question. We have been taught since we were little children that Christians study the Bible. That is taken for granted. Yet it doesn't take a little child much growing up to discover that many adult Christians don't, in fact, study the Bible. In fact, one of the astonishing anomalies to be found on this planet earth is that:

...millions of Christians would die to preserve the Bible, yet never seriously read it on their own;

...millions of Christians would fight battles to defend the plenary, verbal inspiration of Scripture, yet never spend thirty minutes a week intelligently studying the stoutly defended Scriptures;

...millions of Christians rejoice in the fact that the Bible is the best-selling book, yet they know full well that for many it is the most carelessly studied book on earth;

...millions of Christians carry their Bibles around, they go to meetings by the hundreds, to seminars and retreats and to refresher courses, yet they never seem to grow in their personal, usable knowledge of Scripture, always being taught, yet seldom teaching anyone else;

...millions of Christians go to church faithfully every Sunday, listen to great sermons and rejoice in the purity of their faith, pleased to possess the very latest translations, yet many have never read the Bible through, much less studied it through;

...millions of Christians are thrilled to be members of fine churches, listening to excellent music, rejoicing in the faith of their fathers, and yet many, as John MacArthur has said, could be torn to shreds in twenty minutes by the most ordinary Jehovah's Witness.

Any thinking person would surely ask why this is. May it not be because we are not truly convinced that we need, in fact, to study the Bible. Let's consider this topic under four answers:

WE SHOULD STUDY THE BIBLE BECAUSE...

1. We should study the Bible because WE'RE COMMANDED TO.

Many of us have learned since Sunday School days the strong command found in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the Word of Truth." Or as the Living Bible says it: "Work hard so that God can say to you, 'Well done!' Be a

good workman, one who does not need to be ashamed when God examines your work. Know what His Word says and means.”

I am stirred by Harold Lindsell’s statement, as found in his book, *God’s Incomparable Word*, in this regard:

“The Christian is cautioned that he will be judged according to his labors and the basis on which the judgment will be made is how well he knows the Word of the living God. We may conclude that once a person becomes a Christian, he or she has an ongoing responsibility to read, to study and to know the Word of God. This is not optional, it is obligatory. But it is not to be thought of as a chore. It is work of course, but it is not a chore. It pays off rich dividends because it brings the believer closer to God, it helps transform his life and it provides him with the food he needs to grow in grace.”

This is such an important statement. Of course the study of Scripture is work. Christ invites us to this privilege of working with Him in Matthew 11:28,29: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” He tells us that true rest is found in worthwhile work, in a significant mission in life, and the basis of the preparation for that mission is to know the Lord Jesus. And we can know Him only by the study of the Word of God. He asserted this so clearly in His last command in the passage called the Great Commission, in Matthew 28:19,20: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” In other words, study and obey the Scriptures, for in so doing you will find perfect rest.

True rest is found not in withdrawal but in being involved in a worthy goal, in fulfilling a meaningful mission in life. And the basis of preparing for that fulfillment is to know the Lord Jesus which can only be experienced through the attentive and receptive study of the Word of God. Deuteronomy chapter 6 is a passage which is familiar to every Jew. Its words were used in the Old Testament to call every Jew to worship, and these same words form the opening prayer which every orthodox Jew offers up every morning. We read: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (vs. 4-5). The Lord Jesus quoted this passage as containing the heart of true faith (Luke 10:27).

But note carefully the important verses that follow, verses which help us understand how we can indeed love the Lord with all our being (vs. 6-9):

“And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house

and on your gates.”

Clearly God sovereignly commands that His Word be the very center of our lives, to be taught so diligently that it penetrates our subconscious. It is not to be mentioned indifferently, casually, carelessly, but constantly and with familiar attention. It is to be the frequent and natural topic of conversation, whatever we are doing and wherever we are living. It must be bound to our hands, to control our thoughts, our desires and even the motives of our lives. It must control both the inner-source of our actions and the outer expression of our plans.

We find another excellent Old Testament exhortation to Bible study in the life of Ezra. Ezra was that ancient scribe who, during his years of exile in Babylon, apparently spent most of his time collating Scripture. What was it that made Ezra unique? The same thing that makes you and me uniquely useful for God. “For Ezra devoted himself to the study and the observance of the Law of the Lord and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.” He studied the Book, he obeyed the Book and he shared the Book. He studied the Bible because he had been commanded to. (Ezra 7:10)

2. We study the Bible because WE'RE EXPECTED TO.

Again and again we find that the Scriptures associate true belief in God with a delight in listening to Him through the Scriptures. An eager desire for the knowledge of the Lord is an expected result of being really born again, the necessary evidence of a new life in Christ.

The very first Psalm considers the contrast between a believer and a non-believer. It says that the unbeliever walks in the counsel of wicked men, he stands in the way of sinners, he sits in the seat of mockers. But, in dramatic contrast, the blessed man's delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night. As a result of this focus on Scripture, this delight in the Word of God, he is like a fruitful tree, planted by the rivers of water, whose leaf does not wither and whatever he does prospers. (Psalm 1:1-3)

The same description is found in the first chapter of Joshua, the great description of Joshua assuming the leadership of Israel after Moses' death. Ringing in his ears are these final words of Moses, given after that final review and declaration of God's marvelous provision to Israel (Deuteronomy 32:46,47): “Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.”

It is not surprising, then, that the first commands of Joshua have to do with the precious command of God: “Be careful to obey all the law that Moses my servant gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful

wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” That is, if we study His Word.

It becomes obvious that God assumes that the preface of every venture for Him, the foundation of every achievement for Him, the preparation for every life lived for Him is the Scriptures. Christ, in John 17:3, makes it clear that “this is eternal life that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” Knowing God is the only thing in our lives that really matters. Jeremiah emphatically states this (Jeremiah 9:23,24): “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, or the strong man boast of his strength, or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me...” And the Apostle John emphasizes this need of knowing the Lord again and again, as in I John 5:20-21: “We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true, for we are in Him who is true—even in His Son, Jesus Christ, the true God and eternal life.”

Paul, in his final word to beloved Ephesian friends, just before embarking on his final trip to Jerusalem where he sensed he would suffer, gives them this assuring promise, “Now I commit you to God and to his Word of Grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among those who are sanctified.” He encouraged the Christians in Rome that “everything written in the past (the Old Testament) was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Rom. 15:4) We insult God by refusing His great encouragement.

And in his final letter to his beloved disciple, Timothy, the old Apostle reminded him that “all Scripture is inspired of God and is profitable... that the man of God may be mature, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:16) He had reminded him in chapter 2:8,9 that “the Word of God is not chained” and that the only thing that can bring life, that can set captives free, is the living, powerful Word of God working in and through an obedient servant of God.

It becomes clear that God expects each believer to study and share the Scriptures. (see Matthew 28:19,20; 2 Timothy 2:2; Hebrews 5:11-14) It is not enough merely to go to church, or to be taught and exhorted, corrected and inspired by others. We must study the Scriptures ourselves so that we can grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ. It is as we share that we grow, that we begin to really understand the power of the Word of God. The Christian who is not carefully and faithfully involved in the study of Scripture is an anomaly in the program of God, because such neglect suggests he is not taking his Christian life seriously. As Sproul says, “To be an adequate Christian, competent in the things of God, one must do more than attend ‘sharing sessions’ and ‘bless-me parties.’ We cannot learn competence by osmosis. The Biblically illiterate Christian is not only

inadequate but unequipped. In fact, he is inadequate because he is unequipped.” No soldier is more dangerous than the one who is inadequately equipped, mentally, physically, emotionally, personally. We are called to be soldiers of Christ. We study Scripture because we’re expected to.

3. We study Scripture because WE NEED TO.

One of the most moving statements in Paul’s writings is that found in his final word to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:6-8,13, words written shortly before he was executed in Rome. “For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing. The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, when you come, bring with you and the books, but especially the parchments.”

What an amazing request from this man who was the greatest Christian leader who ever lived. On his shoulders had rested the initial penetration of the Gentile world with the Gospel. During a period of not more than ten years he accomplished three incredibly fruitful missionary journeys. He planted at least fifty churches and who wrote more than half the New Testament. His sufferings stagger the mind, yet his joy in the midst of his sufferings continues to inspire multitudes to this day. In spite of all his great knowledge and achievements, this old man on the point of death wanted, of all things, especially the parchments, his copies of Old Testament Scriptures.

How on earth can we expect to achieve anything at all for God if we continue ignorant of His word, indifferent to His commands, unaware of His provision and unappreciative of His presence among us in power. We have seen how Joshua, foremost in his instructions to his people, on the threshold of one of the great military ventures of the Scriptures, reminded them how they needed the Word of God to be their guide and daily encouragement. The Apostle Peter, in chapter 2 of his first letter, tells us that we have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, by the living and abiding Word of God. (vs. 23) He exhorts his readers, as a result, to “desire the sincere milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted and discovered that the Lord is good.” (2:1)

He continues to instruct us, in 2 Peter, that the Scriptures are our only source of a knowledge of God, in three verses in chapter 1:

1. Grace and Peace are multiplied through a knowledge of Him, vs. 2.
2. Life and Godliness grow through our knowledge of Him, vs. 3.
3. Effectiveness and Fruitfulness come through the knowledge of Him, vs. 8.

This entire first chapter of Peter's second epistle is a reminder that we need to add to our faith. In other words, he tells us that the new birth is but the beginning of the new growth and that the purpose of being born again is to grow up into Christ so that we can effectively share Him with a needy world. Alas, however, so many Christians seem content just to go to church and be fed and fed and fed, without seriously asking themselves the question, "What is the purpose of all this?" A man goes to school for the purpose of being able to use what he learns, a student studies medicine so he can practice what he knows, and the purpose for going to University is to leave the University equipped to go out into the world and use what has been learned. So it must be in our preparation as servants of God.

It is important that we do not make a mockery of the new birth by being indifferent to seriously nurturing our growth in a personal knowledge of Scripture. We are saved to serve, we learn to teach, we come to go, we receive to give, we are born to reproduce. And anyone who simply 'goes to church,' because it's the 'thing to do on Sundays,' without any practical purpose for doing so is falling far short of the call to which he has been called, in Christ.

We study the Scriptures because we need to. And if we don't study the Scriptures, faithfully and eagerly, is it because we don't feel that we need to know the Lord and His instructions for our lives?

4. Finally, we study the Scriptures because WE WANT TO.

Many will testify to the amazing fact that once one is truly born-again, God not only begins to help us change the direction of our lives but He changes the desires of our hearts as well. Things that once seemed foolishness to us, now seem most important of all. Things that once were truly incomprehensible now become the light of our daily path. Things that once would not have attracted a moment of our time now fill our thoughts and longings.

We find the explanation for this truth in Philippians 2:13 where we are told that "God is at work in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure." God begins to affect both our obedience and our desire to obey. He changes our desires, our priorities, our ambitions, and then he enables us to fulfill those desires by wanting to obey what He commands.

How God does this in us is explained in I Thess 2:13, "We thank God continually because, when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as it actually is, the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe." So we can see that God, in fact, works in us through His Word, that Word which is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, judging the thoughts and motives of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

God then works in us through His Word and we grow in our knowledge of Him. Conversely, if we ignore studying His Word, there is little He can or will do. Our

knowledge of God is dependent on our diligently seeking Him; our failure to seek Him leaves us unequipped and diminishes our appetite to know Him at all. How important is the faithful study of the Word, not least of which is the manner in which it increases our desires to know the Lord and to make Him known.

Oh, this precious book. "Christ is the key to it. Forty men were employed in writing it. It was written by doctors, farmers, fishers, kings, shepherds, old, young, rich, poor, learned and ignorant. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass and the soldier's sword. It is a mine of wealth and health to the soul and a river of pleasure. It is given us in this life and will not be opened to us until the judgment where it is established forever. If you want a crown of rejoicing when Jesus returns to earth again, study your Bible and lead lost souls to Christ and you will have a rich reward." (author unknown)

May the prospect of knowing God be an irresistible motivation for the discipline required to properly study the Word of God. May we sense the hunger for this study and respond to this by the prompting of the Spirit. And may the Spirit's fullness enable us to know and teach the Word of God in a manner we had never thought possible. May our inclination to personal laziness, our preoccupation with many other, more 'urgent' things, our tendency to procrastinate in the doing of what we know are essential things be overcome by allowing God's Word to dwell in us in every area of our lives. (Colossians 3:16) And may we be prepared for the coming of the King.

IF I BUT STUDY GOD'S WORD

The Lord I love went on ahead
To make a home for me. He said
He would come back again, and He -
Oh, gracious love - He wrote to me!
He knew I was so weak and blind
And foolish that I could not find
The road alone. He told me things
That all earth's wise men, and its kings,
Have never guessed, yet I foreknow
If I but read His word. And, oh,
Such depths of love on every sheet!
My heart is trembling at His feet.
What would He think of me
If when I saw Him I should say
'I was too busy every day
To read what Thou didst write to me
I really had no time for Thee!'
(author unknown)

One of the first questions the Lord Jesus will ask of us, when we arrive Home in

heaven may likely be, "What did you do with my Word?" Oh, may we eagerly rejoice in the privilege of possessing it, the opportunity of knowing it and the glory of sharing it, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to a hungry, needy world.