

Essentials for Spiritual Growth

Lesson # 7 -- Growing in Understanding and Practicing the Bible.

Introduction

- A. At the very outset of this lesson we must remind ourselves of the inexorable principle:
There can be no success or progress without a knowledge and honest practice of the truth involved in the area of one's endeavor. This principle is as true and demanding in the Christian life as in science -- if not more so.
- B. Clear illustrations of this principle are all about us. It is the very foundation and practice of science as exemplified in such areas as flight and medicine. As compelling as this truth may be, those of us who are Christians appear to consistently ignore it, in the way we live our daily life. **The appalling and disastrous result of this inconsistency is clearly seen in the powerlessness, lethargy, anger, compromise, hopelessness, lack of love, joy, peace, faith and outright sinfulness that often characterizes our manner of life.**
- C. While it would be correct to say that much of our problem in this area is due to ignorance and the subtle yet powerful work of the enemy -- it is also necessary to point out **that most believers, and even we who accept this point, often passively allow it to go on -- as well as having many so-called "good reasons," for not engaging in serious Bible study, in which the Word of God is internalized, and spiritual warfare.**
- D. Our very approach to this important subject of truth, the daily life, the enemy, the priority of the spiritual, and personal progress **appears to be characterized by a form of paralysis.** And yet, how easy it is for us to become excited, work together in unity, spend a good deal of money, and make considerable progress, **in areas which are, in comparison, trivia.** **Are we deceived?** We must unite to break this bondage! When are we going to start?
- E. The primary reason why this subject is so important, beyond all that is said above, is that **truth -- cannot be separated from the Person of God. He is the God of Truth -- "O LORD, the God of Truth."** Ps 31:5

The obvious application of these principles is found in Nathan's rebuke of David, who as a Godly man, one who hungered for God, and who was evidently Spirit filled, made a choice not to submit himself to the Bible.

Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? ... Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, **because you despised me** and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own. II Sam 12:9,10

Notice: the sin that was more serious than adultery and murder, and led to his sin, was despising the Word of God and through that God Himself!

I. The Bible is Our Only Final Authority.

A. Biblical authority is based on divine revelation.

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but **in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son**, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. Hebrews 1:1,2

Comment: While a very strong case can be made for the Bible as our authority through the avenues of archeology (facts in the Bible harmonize with facts of ancient history), Christian evidences (prophecy, miracles, conversion etc.), apologetics (what would we expect if God existed and revealed Himself?), philosophy (the Bible answers life's basic problems), and psychology (the Bible explains man, his problems, and solutions), it is helpful to see that we accept the Bible as the authoritative Word of God because that was the consistent belief and practice of the Lord Jesus.

B. Biblical authority is based on inspiration.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. II Timothy 3:16,17

Comment: When we speak of inspiration we are reminding ourselves that the Bible has been supernaturally produced. And, that the work of inspiration extended to the production of words. Because of these truths it is correct to call the Holy Scripture final authority, infallible and inerrant in the original manuscripts.

A good definition of inspiration is given by Rene Pasche in his book *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Moody Press, 1969) p. 45.

Biblical inspiration ... is that ... activity of the Holy Spirit through which He mysteriously filled the human spirit of the biblical writers and guided and overruled them, so that there arose an infallible, Spirit-wrought writing, a sacred record, a Book of God, with which the Spirit of God evermore organically unites Himself.

C. Biblical authority is based on the belief and practice of the Lord Jesus.

1. He called the Bible "The Commands of God" and "The Word of God."

And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside **the commands of God** in order to observe your own traditions! ... Thus you nullify **the word of God** by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." Mark 7:9,13

Comment: These designations by our Savior, are shown in this passage, to bear the weight and meaning of "final authority" in that they are held up in contrast to the "traditions" of the Jewish people -- which the Lord Jesus teaches here to not only be non-authoritative -- but harmful and destructive to the true meaning of Scripture. It would be helpful to see if we have such traditions among us that enable us "set aside and nullify the commands of the Word of God."

2. He made no distinction between His authority and that of Scripture.

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, **if you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"** John 5:39, 46, 47

Comment: The instruction we gain from how the Lord Jesus looked upon the Old Testament is filled with direction for us. There is no question about His acceptance of **the inspiration of the Scripture** (God said - David said; Scripture; the Word of God, the Commands of God), **the historical fact of it's contents** (Adam and Eve, Noah and the Flood, Jonah and the whale, etc.), **and it's final authority** ("The Scripture cannot be broken" John 10:35).

3. He made both Himself and the Bible the object of faith.

If you believed Moses (the Old Testament), you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?" John 5:46,47

I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins." John 8:24

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6

Comment: The teaching found in these passages is clear and demanding. They show the belief of the Lord Jesus regarding the Scripture, regarding Himself, and His place in the plan of salvation. Our Savior believed He was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah -- He was the "I Am" -- and salvation came only through believing those truths about Him and personally surrendering to Him and His authority in actions demonstrating repentance and faith.

4. He held people responsible for the Bible.

"As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say." John 12:47-50

Comment: In this passage the Lord Jesus again identifies the authority of His teaching with the authority of the Bible (what the Father told Him to say, cf. Heb 1:1-3). He points out that it is this "Word" (divine revelation) which will be the standard of judgment for each of us when we step into Heaven (Rom 14:11,12; I Cor 3:13-15; II Cor 5:10). There are a number of additional passages which indicates how the Lord Jesus held people responsible for the Scripture: (Matt 12:3,5; 19:4; 21:16,42; 22:31,32; 24:34,45; Mark 7:6,8,9,13). **We must accept this truth and submit ourselves to God through submitting ourselves to the authority of the Bible as our standard for belief and practice.**

II. The Bible is the Channel Through Which God Works Powerfully.

A. The Bible is described as spiritually powerful.

The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. **The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.** John 6:63

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because **it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes:** first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. Romans 1:16

For 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

Comment: The Bible has been given to us as a "means of Grace," i.e., God has provided us with His Word and has chosen to bring His grace powerfully into our life through that means. That is why we are told to "Grow in grace and knowledge." (II Peter 3:18) This truth again underlines the importance and value of knowing what the Bible teaches, knowing the will of God as expressed in the Bible, and responding to God through the Bible by decisions of faith, love, and hope.

B. The Lord Jesus used His Word spiritually and powerfully.

And a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." **Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand."** So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. Matthew 12:10-13

Comment: One truth emphasized in this passage of Scripture is that the power of God accompanies or "flows through" the Word of God. When the Lord Jesus "spoke" to the man, he had the ability to do what was never true before, he could "stretch out" his hand.

Is the "situation" any different today? Are we now living in a time when the Word of God is powerless? The answer can only be "No." When a passage of Scripture applies to us as God's will -- then that Word will be the channel through which God wants to work powerfully -- if we respond to Him Biblically (in submission, by faith and love). While we may not dictate to God *how* and *when* -- we may not dismiss this clear illustration and its teaching.

C. Examples of what our Lord wants to do -- powerfully -- through His Word.

1. The Word of God is **the channel of joy**

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. John 15:11

"I am coming to you now, but **I say these things** while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. John 17:13

Comment: As these verses indicate -- joy is a byproduct of knowing and living the truths taught by the Lord Jesus. Many believers struggle to enter into His joy and often feel frustrated because they are reading, studying, and attempting to live out the Bible in daily life. It is important to know that when such a situation occurs, there may be hidden problems that cause such frustration, and that need to be uncovered and the solutions practiced. In such situations there is often the need of another person or two who could help identify such problems and offer, along with suggestions, healing prayer.

2. The Word of God is **the channel of sanctification**

Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. John 17:17

Comment: The word "sanctify" simply means "to cleanse" and/or "make holy." God seeks to lead us out of our bondage to sin into his freedom in righteousness and holiness.

3. The Word of God is **the channel of life.**

As you hold out **the word of life**--in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. Philippians 2:16

Comment: In this passage the title given to the Bible indicates what God wants to do through His Word -- bring life. This may be applied to non-Christians in terms of salvation, or the Christian in regard to some areas of life where there is more death than life. The non-Christian may thus be led to repentance and faith, and the Christian may be led to renounce an area of life not in the will of God and thereby receive forgiveness, cleansing, and freedom.

4. The Word of God is **the provision of armor.**

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, Ephesians 6:14

Comment: When one submits to God through His Word and makes the choice to practice the truth of that Word -- the result is spiritual protection. We need to be warned through these verses. All error, dishonesty, hypocrisy, lies and sin opens the door to further deception, bondage, and provides an open door to the enemy. Many have taken that route in life -- and the destructive journey began by neglecting the Bible and then Lord Himself.

5. The Word of God is **the provision of weapons.**

Take the helmet of salvation and **the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.** Ephesians 6:17

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Ephesians 6:18

Comment: All through the Scripture the truth and prayer are presented as the believer's weapons. We have the example of the Lord Jesus (Matt 4:1-11), Paul (II Cor 10:4,5), and Peter (I Peter 5:8,9) indicating how important it is to understand and utilize our weapons. It is not enough to want to be free. We must learn how to obey God when

He tells us to "resist" the enemy. And, many times, that resisting goes beyond simply living in obedience by the practice of the Word, we must, as the three mentioned above, be aggressive in the use of our weapons. In such times it is Biblical and very necessary to "speak against" and "pray against" the enemy in a very aggressive way. It is helpful to see that the word "word" in Eph 6:17 is "rhema" which means to "speak the Word". Many believers have been severely hindered in their Christian life because they have not been taught how to be aggressive and speak the Word against the enemy, or they have retreated in fear.

C. Illustrations of what the Lord Jesus wants to do -- powerfully -- through His Word.

1. The Bible is likened to seed -- to give life. I Peter 1:23

2. The Bible is likened to food -- to strengthen. Heb 5:12
3. The Bible is likened to water -- to cleanse. Eph 5:25,26
4. The Bible is likened to a lamp -- to enlighten. Ps 119:105
5. The Bible is likened to a glass -- to reflect James 1:23
6. The Bible is likened to a shield -- to guard. Eph 6:14
7. The Bible is likened to a sword -- to protect. Eph 6:17
8. The Bible is likened to a hammer -- to break. Jer 23:29
9. The Bible is likened to a rock -- to support. Matt 7:24

Summary comment on this topic: The above suggestions as to what the Lord Jesus want to do in our daily life through His Word -- is but a brief sample. Watch for such truths as you read the Bible. God wants to do much more for us than we can imagine. And, He has made His Word available to us, and through His Word, "all spiritual benefits".

III. The Bible Presents us with Exhortations -- Instructions for Response.

A. The Word of God must be read.

For Ezra had devoted himself to **the study and observance of the Law of the LORD**, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel. Ezra 7:10

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But **his delight is in the law of the LORD**, and on his law he meditates day and night. Psalm 1:1,2

We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and great us by disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to those who heard him. Hebrews 2:1-4

See to it that you **do not refuse him who speaks**. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? Hebrews 12:25

Comment: These passages are but a few samples of the many exhortations to pay attention to what God has said to us. Every believer has the responsibility of learning the message of the Bible and making it practical in daily life. It is not enough to hear sermons in Church.

We must develop our own study habits and also study with those who can help us.

B. The Word of God must be mixed with faith.

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just

as they did; **but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.** Hebrews 4:1,2

Comment: This passage is a divine commentary on the reason the Israelites could not enter into the Land of Canaan at Kadesh Barnea (Num 13,14). God had promised the land to them generations before, they had been given many illustrations of God's power and faithfulness in their deliverance from Egypt, they had great leaders as Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb -- but the majority made a choice -- a choice of unbelief -- not to respond to God's promise with faith and trust. In their disobedience they lost the opportunity of entering the land. **This exhortation is filled with meaning for every believer. Israel's failure to respond to the promise of God is usually the way we read and study the Bible. It is so often only an intellectual exercise. We must learn how to combine God's Word with faith -- and discipline ourselves to do it.**

C. The Word of God must be obeyed in love.

"If you love me, you will obey what I command." John 14:15

This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, I John 5:3

Comment: To know Who God is, and how He has designed the Bible for our benefit, and then not to respond to Him and His Word in love by obedience -- is a serious sin. While most of us fail in this regard due to ignorance and the lack of support from others, **we must face our own personal responsibility.** Love and obedience are two sides of the same coin. When we disobey the Bible we are saying to God, "You are not worthy of being loved and Your Word is not helpful to me."

Conclusion: The word given to Joshua, when he was facing one of the most serious moments of his life, is appropriate to conclude this lesson. This verse is a summary principle that applies to all believers.

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. Joshua 1:8

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