

"Have You Not Read...?"

Peter Ditzel

I think that many Christians would be surprised to learn that Jesus held people responsible for reading and knowing the Scriptures. Notice just some of the passages quoting Jesus that indicate this:

"Have ye not read what David did..." (Matthew 12:3).

"Or have ye not read in the law..." (Matthew 12:5).

"Have ye not read, that he which made them..." (Matthew 19:4).

"Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes..." (Matthew 21:16).

"Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone..." (Matthew 21:42).

"Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God..." (Matthew 22:29).

"But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read..." (Matthew 22:31).

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

The apostle James wrote, "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted [Greek *emphuton*—"implanted"] word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21). This does not mean that Jesus or James promoted a works-based religion. They were not saying that we are saved by reading the Bible. The written and spoken Word of God is not the cause of our salvation. Ephesians 2:8-9 is entirely correct in saying, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." But we cannot be saved by faith unless we know the Gospel. So, we can see the importance of knowing at least some of what is in the Bible. It is not the cause of our salvation, but an instrument that God uses to enable our justification by faith.

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Sanctification, however, is also a part of our salvation. Sanctification is God's work of making His children holy. But God uses secondary means to accomplish it. Now notice the specific means through which Jesus, in prayer to the Father, says we are sanctified: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17). So, we are sanctified by God's Word. It is like food that enables us to grow in holiness.

Peter exhorted the Christians to whom he wrote, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). And as we grow, we should be able to grow beyond "milk," or the first principles of God's Word, to the stronger and deeper doctrines that the Bible calls "meat." One of the matters that Paul rebuked the Corinthians over was the fact that they had not grown enough to stand this "meat": "I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able" (1 Corinthians 3:2).

The writer of Hebrews leaves off teaching about Melchizedek to say, "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:11-14). They were "dull of hearing." Why? They had become "unskilful in the word of righteousness."

The same can be said for most who profess Christianity today. The statistics are appalling. Here is a sampling: Ron Rhodes, of Reasoning from Scripture Ministries, states that 35 percent of born-again Christians do not read the Bible at all. Rhodes also points out, "Among those Christians who do read the Bible, the majority of them only read it during the one hour they attend church each Sunday morning."¹ Of 8,665 people surveyed in the United States, 99.7% of whom said they are followers of Jesus Christ, "only one-half read the Bible daily, with another 37% reading it more than once a week, but not daily. Only two out of five respondents have read the entire Bible. When asked what hinders their Bible reading, most participants indicated that they are 'too busy'."² Fifty-six percent of self-identified Christians in America born between 1980 and 1991 rarely or never read the Bible.³

Notice above that most people said they are too busy to read the Bible. Certainly, we live in a very busy culture. We must make a living, and we have family and other responsibilities. Yet, sales of entertainment and recreational items continue strong. Why is it that we are not too busy for them? Isn't it really a matter of getting our priorities straight? If any of us learned that there was a treasure box full of precious jewels buried in our backyard, I think we would suddenly find we had a lot of time to dig until we found it. Peter told Jesus that He had "the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). These words are now in the Bible, and they are more precious than any earthly treasure. Don't ignore God's gracious gift of His Word and become weaklings who are starving for spiritual nourishment. Make a commitment now to read and study your Bible daily.

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

Acts 20:32

¹ <http://www.assistnews.net/strategic/s0112058.htm>

² http://www.centerforbibleengagement.org/images/stories/pdf/cbe_survey_results.pdf

³ <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20100427/survey-most-young-people-are-lost-despite-christian-label/index.html>