

Moving from Membership to Discipleship: Bible Study
Psalm 19:7-11
January 15, 2012

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Today is the first week in our sermon series on the six disciplines of the Christian life. The six life habits we are going to explore are the things that God wants to be second nature for us – things that should come to us as natural as breathing.

You just heard our text from Psalm 19, but here is an abbreviated version of those verses: The law of the Lord is perfect; The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy; The precepts of the Lord are right; The commands of the Lord are radiant; The fear of the Lord is pure; The ordinances of the Lord are sure; They are more precious than gold; They are sweeter than honey; In keeping them there is great reward.

Is it just me or does it also seem to you like this world, and more particularly this country, has gone completely off course? I mean, look around. What in the world is wrong with these United States of ours?

People are killing each other because the traffic isn't moving as fast as they would like. Six people found stabbed and beaten to death over a stolen home video game system. Teachers are prevented from maintaining order and discipline in school and now many schools look more like battle grounds than school grounds. And speaking of schools, in the state of Illinois, it is illegal to read the Bible in public schools, but state law requires that every prisoner in a penial institution be provided a Bible.

Laws have been passed that give more protection to the egg of eagle than to a baby in its mother's womb. Laws are being interpreted in ways that destroy the sanctity of the institution of marriage. What's wrong? It wasn't like this 60 years ago. What has changed between 1952 and 2012?

There have been many changes in the last sixty years, but the one that counts the most, the one which is responsible for the current state of the nation, is the change that has happened in people's estimation of the Word of God. For the last sixty years, people, in droves, have been turning their backs on what God has to say. And many of the people who haven't abandoned God's Word have been selectively deciding what is and isn't really God's Word according to our current politically correct system of thinking.

We shouldn't be at all surprised by this because Paul warns that this will happen. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul writes, *"For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear"* (2 Tim 4:3).

We are living in just such a time. We are living in a day when morals are being rewritten to suit the corruption of the day. We are living in a time when many churches are claiming that, at best, the Bible only contains God's Word. Do you know what that means? That means that if there's anything in the Bible you don't like you can throw it out simply by claiming that part is just the writers prejudice and not really what the Holy Spirit inspired him to write.

Other people claim that the Bible has had so many parts added and others taken out that we can't take what it says literally. I don't believe that. Do you? I refuse to believe that because that says one of two things; either God doesn't care that we are dealing with an inferior and polluted version of his Word; or it says that God isn't powerful enough to keep his Word pure. Now, I don't know how each of you feel about this, but I can tell you that the God I worship isn't guilty of either one of those.

The God that I put my faith in is the God whose Holy Spirit inspired the human authors of the Bible to write exactly what they wrote. The God I believe in is a God who has complete control of everything, which means he not only controlled the content of his holy Word he also has protected that content down through the ages so that the Scripture we have today is the true, accurate, and complete Word of God. This is the God that I believe in. Is this the God you believe in? And the Bible I read I believe is the true and infallible Word of that God. Do you believe that, too?

You might be asking yourself why I'm going to such length about the truth and infallibility of the Bible. I've done this so I can ask you a few more questions. First, if the Bible is the true and unaltered Word of God, how much of the Bible should we, as Christians, know – and why? The second question is, as an individual Christian, how much of the Bible do you know? The last question is, if we don't know as much as we should, how are we going to become better acquainted with God's Word?

First question, how much of the Bible should we know? If your answer is anything less than all your brain can hold, you have the wrong answer. You can't know too much about God's Word. You can't possibly be too familiar with what God has to say to you. The more you know the things that God has had written for you in his holy Word, the easier your Christian walk will be, the easier you it will be for you to resist sin, the more comfort you'll feel when your world seems to be falling apart, the better you'll be at telling others about the love that God has for them and his plan for their salvation.

That's the personal side of familiarity with Scripture. On a more public side, the more

people know and understand God's Word the better all of society will be. And that's not just my personal view. The following is an excerpt from the University of Harvard "Rules and Precepts" adopted in 1646:

(1) Every one shall consider the main end of his life and studies to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life.

(2) Seeing the Lord giveth wisdom, every one shall seriously by prayer in secret seek wisdom of him.

(3) Every one shall so exercise himself in reading the Scriptures twice a day that they be ready to give an account of their proficiency therein, both in theoretical observations of languages and logic, and in practical and spiritual truths ... "

In the 17th century, 52% of all Harvard graduates became ministers. Do you think they understood the importance of knowing God's Word?

Another comment on knowing Scripture comes from Martin Luther. As I read this, listen not only to the warning but also to the prophecy. "I am much afraid that the universities will prove to be the great gates to Hell, unless they diligently labor to explain the Holy Scriptures and to engrave them upon the hearts of youth. I advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount. Every institution where men are not unceasingly occupied with the Word of God must become corrupt." My brothers and sisters, look around at our society. Is Luther's warning right?

My second question is how much how much of the Bible do you know. That's a very personal question. It's also a very important question. And like the first question, there's only one answer. The only proper answer is not enough. I don't know enough, you don't know enough, no one knows enough.

At the seminary, I met some professors who are so smart it mind-boggling. I once watched Dr. Walter A. Maier II go one for over five minutes reciting verbatim from the book of John. But do you know what? Dr. Maier will be the first to tell you he doesn't know nearly enough about God's Word.

God's Word is so deep and so profound that it's impossible to know everything it contains. That's why, on this side of the grave, we will never know enough, we will never sufficiently understand all that God has given us in Scripture. Anyone who thinks they know everything they need to know about the Bible is guilty of plain old human arrogance.

Today's last question is rather obvious. Since we should now all be in agreement over the fact we don't know enough about the Bible, how are we going to solve that problem? And for the third time – one size fits all. The answer to the question is the same for you

and me – Bible study. If we're going to get better acquainted with God's Word we must study God's Word. We must study it, and study it, and study it. From the cradle to the grave, we must be occupied with the Word of God.

Just a thought that harkens back to why we need to know as much as possible about God's Word. Do you know that some of the most likely victims of cults and false religions are people who only know a little about what Scripture says. People like Jim Jones, David Koresh, Jehovah Witnesses, and the Mormon church thrive on people who know enough about God's Word to feel they should follow it, but don't know enough about God's Word to separate truth from fiction. Someone who fits that description can be led astray because what they hear from these minions of Satan "sounds about right – that sounds about like I remember it." The best protection against false doctrine is knowledge of the truth.

As I said earlier, knowledge of God's Word comes only from Bible Study. As convenient as it might seem, God does not just pour his holy Scripture into someone's head. God wants us to spend time with his Word. God wants us to mine every gem of truth for ourselves. Things we work for are more precious to us than things that are given to us. God wants us to dig into his Word and God will reward our labor. Bible study will not only increase our knowledge of the Bible, it will also increase our wisdom regarding God's ways, it will increase our ability to lead decent Christian lives, and it will increase the comfort and joy we experience in this life.

Since I have been here at Prince of peace, we have had about 30 people in Bible study. Why? Why weren't there 50 or 100 people? I'm hoping the folks who weren't there just didn't understand the importance of knowing what God has to say. I'm also hoping this message has done something to correct that problem.

I have a challenge for you. We have just begun a study of the book of Romans. Today I challenge each one of you to come to Bible study. In fact, I want you to come for four weeks. If at the end of those four weeks you feel that you've haven't learned anything you didn't already know, then stop coming. However, if you end up learning something, and I'm sure you will, then I pray you will admit your need to draw closer to the handbook for Christian living that God took the time to prepare for you.

Friends, the most basic building block for the Christian life is Bible study. The foundation of faith is in the Word of God. God prepared his Word so we could study it and learn from it. The Bible is God's love letter to us. He gave it to us because loves us and he wants to make our lives joyful and complete. Sometime during this week pick up your Bible and read it. Then next Sunday come and join us as we study God's Word. Come and let God build you up through his Word into the joyful, useful servant that he wants you to be.