

Introduction

I'd like to begin this morning by giving you a little Bible quiz. The questions are as follows: (1) Is Thomas a book in the Bible? (No); (2) Is Jonah a book in the Bible? (Yes); (3) Is the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament or New Testament? (Old Testament); (4) In what city was Jesus born? (Bethlehem); (5) How many disciples did Jesus have? (12); and (6) Is the expression "God helps those who help themselves" in the Bible? (No) How many of the six did you answer correctly?

Those questions were part of a study that the Barna Research Group conducted several years ago to determine how well Christians know the Bible. The "telling" results of that study are as follows. 34% missed the first question, 39% the second, 24% the third, 30% the fourth, 22% the fifth, and finally 62% the sixth.

Christians Don't Study and Know the Bible

Those results led the Barna Research Group to conclude this. Many professing Christians don't know the most basic facts about the Bible.

That conclusion leads us logically to another. If Christians don't know the Bible's basic facts, then they certainly don't know its deeper truths. Last year at Yearly Meeting, for instance, a Christian said to me that **"The only Biblical grounds for divorce is adultery."** But is that what the Bible really teaches? Most Christians don't know the answer to that? After a funeral service years ago, a Christian declared to several others and me, **"According to the Bible, anyone who commits suicide goes to hell?"** But is that what the Bible really teaches? Most Christians don't know the answer to that?

My point is this. Many if not most professing Christians don't have a real working knowledge of the Bible. They don't know it as they should.

There's a reason they don't. It's because they don't study it as they should. If we study the Bible as we should, we'll know it as we should. If we don't know it as we should, therefore, it's because we don't study it

as we should. A host of surveys and studies show that to be the case. They show that 70% of professing Christians read the Bible two days or less a week. And that those who do read it average only 9 minutes a day doing so. The bottom line is that 70% of Christians read it 18 minutes or less a week.

The verdict is in. Christians don't know the Bible as they should because they don't study it as they should.

The Bible Is Inspired

But so what? What's the big deal about studying and knowing the Bible? Do we really need to? That's a valid question and I'd answer it now. Yes, we need to! 2 Timothy 3:15-16 tells us why. It's inspired.

Writing to a young pastor-protégé of his named Timothy, Paul mentions "**the sacred writings**" in verse 15 and "**Scripture**" in verse 16. Sacred writings and Scripture refer to the same thing – the 39 books of the Old Testament. Now, notice what Paul claims about those books in verse 16. They're "inspired." That means that their authors wrote down what God revealed to them. The Old Testament is, therefore, the word of God. It claims in fact to be just that. Exodus 35:1; Isaiah 1:2; Ezekiel 3:10-11, and Zephaniah 1:1 are typical examples of its claim.

But what about the New Testament? It claims to be just as inspired as the Old is. Here are verses that claim that: John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:1,10,13; 7:25,40; 14:37; Galatians 1:11-12; Ephesians 3:3-5; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 3:15-16; and Revelation 1:1.

You can see then that the Bible is inspired. Its authors wrote down what He revealed to them. It is, therefore, literally the word of God.

And that, according to verse 16, makes it profitable. The Bible is inspired and is profitable because it is. It is profitable in two ways.

The Bible Informs

First, it informs. We see that in the words "teaching" and "reproof" in verse 16. Teaching refers to revealing what is true. Reproof refers to

revealing what is not true. The Bible, in other words, tells us what is and isn't true about the universe and life in it.

That makes sense doesn't it? God created the universe and life in it. He designed and made it and knows everything there is to know about it. He knows far more about physics than Stephen Hawking does, or business than Donald Trump does, or family than Dr. Phil does, or cooking than Rachel Ray does, or life in general than Oprah does.

Which reveals what the Bible, as God's word, essentially is. It's He telling us not all but some of what He knows about the universe and life in it. Do you realize what that ultimately means? It's that the Bible gives us best information about the most important matters in human life.

Notice I said the most important matters in human life. Those are the ones that mean the most to us: love, money, sex, work, dress, looks, marriage, divorce, parenting, anger, anxiety, friends, enemies, business, death, life after death, and much more.

Well, the Bible gives us the best information about those most important matters – not all the information but the best. Take Dr. Phil's latest book on marriage, for instance. As good as the information in it may be, the Bible's is better. Or Take Suze Orman's latest book on money. As good as the information in it may be, the Bible's is better.

The Bible, in other words, tells us how to live. Do you want to live the best possible life on earth? Study, know, and apply what the Bible says. You will if you do. That's Paul's very point in verse 15. The Bible is **"able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation."**

Takes looks as an example of what I mean. Beauty is one of our culture's highest values. People want to be beautiful – and worry that they aren't or eventually won't be. A cross section of fourth grade girls were asked the question, "What is the biggest worry in your life right now?" They gave one answer more than any other, "My weight." Imagine fourth grade girls, most thin, worrying about weight. That's what happens when we value physical beauty. So, don't, the Bible says in Matthew 6:27-30. Don't value physical beauty. Value inner beauty,

beauty of character, instead. You won't worry if you do because God gives that to everyone who wants it. He supplies an inner beauty that simply outshines the physical beauty of the loveliest people alive.

You can see that those verses reprove. They tell us that physical beauty is not defining. So don't cherish it. They also teach. They tell us that inner beauty is defining. So do cherish it. That's the best way to live.

There's no doubt about it. The Bible's profitable because it informs.

The Bible Transforms

It's profitable a second way. It transforms. We see that in the words "correction" and "training for righteousness" in verse 16. "Teaching" and "reproof" are about what we know. "Correction" and "training" are about what we do. "Correction" refers to not doing what is foolish or wrong. "Training" refers to doing what is wise or right. Well, the Bible transforms us to both of those ends. It does so in two ways.

First, it reorders our minds, hearts, bodies, and souls. This is a natural phenomenon. When we study something, whatever it is, we take its order and nature into those aspects of our being. Since God wrote the Bible, its order and nature are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and excellent to quote Philippians 4:8. Studying it, therefore, reorders our minds, hearts, bodies, and souls in those ways. Our minds, hearts, bodies, and souls become truer, more honorable and so on.

The Bible transforms us in a second way. It restores our souls. The verse at the top of your bulletin, Psalm 19:7, teaches us just that, **"The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul."** The "law" there is a synonym for the Bible. The Bible is perfect and restores our souls.

This is a supernatural phenomenon. As Hebrews 4:12 teaches, the Bible, because it is God's word, has inherent transforming power. And what it transforms is our souls. The soul is the life center that regulates the mind, heart, and body. Well, the Bible transforms it, which in turn transforms the mind, heart, and body as well. Those aspects of us are

then directed away from the foolish and wrong and to the wise and right.

Two weeks ago, I finished a six-month verse-by-verse study of the Book of Psalms. That study changed me in several ways, one of which is this. The prizes and problems of life seem smaller to me and God seems bigger. They seem dimmer and He seems more vivid and real. I'm actually a different person, a better person, as a result of that study. I'm not upset, for instance, that the Yankees are in last place.

You can see from what I've said that studying and knowing the Bible is one of the most profitable of all human activities. It is one of the central ways that God informs and transforms us.

Study and Know the Bible

So, study and know the Bible. That's the implied call of 2 Timothy 3:15-16. Devotedly study and know it.

Now, many sincere followers of Jesus don't do that and here's why. The Bible intimidates them. A Christian once told me that she wanted to know the Bible but couldn't. I asked her why and she told me. **"It's too difficult and I'm too dumb,"** she said. You may think that same thing – that you aren't smart enough to know a book as difficult and big as the Bible is. But you are smart enough! You can know it! And here's how – by doing two things.

First, see the forest. Get a general overview of the Bible. Learn its basic unity and flow and where and how the individual books fit into that. I've written three handouts that can assist you in learning that.

The first is a chronological chart of the Bible. You may or may not know that the books that make it up aren't in chronological order. That sometimes causes some confusion, which this chart will clear up.

The second handout is an explanation of Genesis 12:1-3. Those three verses are the theological foundation of the entire Bible. God gives Abraham three promises and the rest of the Bible is an unfolding of He trying to fulfilling them. That explains many things, including the coming of Jesus Himself.

The third handout is a *Survey of the Bible*. It summarizes its 66 books chronologically and in terms of the Genesis 12:1-3 handout. That in turn makes their purposes and contents intelligible to you.

Those are the handouts. If you'd like one or more put your name on the sign-up sheet in the narthex and indicate which ones you want. Study and grasp those three handouts. You'll see the forest if you do and realize that the Bible isn't as difficult as you thought it was.

Seeing the forest assists you in doing the second thing. See the trees. The trees stand for the words, sentences, and paragraphs that make up the Bible's content. The first step in knowing that content is to learn how to interpret and apply it, which I'll preach about next week. Once you've done that, you're then ready to see the trees, to study and know the Bible's words, sentences, and paragraphs.

I'm not challenging you to do something that I myself don't do – on my own time at home in the evenings. Having learned how to interpret and apply the Bible's content, I study its books verse by verse. In 2005, 2006, and 2007, for instance, I studied the entire New Testament verse by verse. It took me three years but I did it. I mentioned that I spent the past six months studying the Book of Psalms verse by verse. Having finished that, I'm now studying the Book of Ezekiel.

That then is the best way to study and know the Bible. See the forest first and then using that as your foundation, see the trees. Spend the rest of your lives studying and knowing the Bible's content - the words, sentences, and paragraphs that make it up.

Conclusion

I close with the dying words of one of America's greatest founding fathers, Patrick Henry. Lying in bed, close to death, Henry turned to a friend of his and said, "**The Bible is worth more than all the other books which were ever written put together, yet it is my misfortune never to have found the time to read it.**" Let's do what Patrick Henry didn't. Let's study and know the Bible.