

DO YOU KNOW THE HOLY SCRIPTURES?

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I visited with a man recently who after over 35 years of marriage walked out on his wife.

He professes to be a Christian.

He has been in churches all of his life.

When I asked him how he squared this conduct with his beliefs, he said that he really couldn't.

When I asked how he could take this action in the face of what God says in the Bible - He said he didn't know.

And then he recovered and began to give me insight into his belief system:

He said I believe that "love covers all sins" and God is love.

He further said that in regard to this sin of leaving his wife of over 35 years - well "a sin is a sin is a sin".

And then he asked me, "God does forgive doesn't He - Isn't that what you teach".

With the way he mutilated, twisted and left significant phrases and ideas out of Scripture - I thought I was talking to Archie Bunker of "All in the Family" or Tevye in "Fiddler on the Roof".

This man's understanding of God's Word, the Bible, was so confused that I could quickly see that appealing to his sense of right and wrong was hopeless - he didn't know right from wrong.

No, his was not just a case of disobedience, disobedient though it was, his was a case of ignorance - his beliefs were faulty (maybe intentionally so).

A man's actions, far more than his words, tell me what he actually believes.

If this man believed in God, his idea of God was very wrong.

His God was indifferent if not indulgent of his actions.

His God had no real standards of right and wrong.

His God would somehow just overlook his actions.

This man had no real understanding of the future.

He believed far more strongly in the present than in the future.

He had no real appreciation for a heaven to gain and a hell to shun.

He was ignorant of the consequences of sin either in the future, or in the present.

At first I was angry with him, and then I felt strong pity for him.

I said to my wife, "If only he knew what was ahead for him". "If only I could help him understand that obedience pays the greatest dividends."

In his ignorance and subsequent sin he is charting a course for himself that will have devastating consequences in his own life and the lives of many in his family for generations.

This man is ignorant of the Scriptures!

I ask, "DO YOU KNOW THE HOLY SCRIPTURES?"

There is a crisis of biblical knowledge in our churches today.

I'd be discouraged to know how many evangelicals have no regular time for study of God's Word on their own.

And that lack of knowledge of the Scriptures is resulting in a people who are unfortunately too similar to the culture in which they live.

Why are "church going" people divorced at nearly the same rate as non-"church going" people?

Why is the incidence of premarital intercourse nearly as high among students who attend America's churches as among those who don't?

Why are there so many workers and employers even in our evangelical churches whose work and business ethics are seriously questioned by even their unbelieving associates at work?

Why are the lifestyles of professing Christians little if any different than the lifestyles of those who make no claim to being followers of Christ?

The same movies, videos and television shows are watched.

Professing Christians are getting tipsy if not drunk at their parties also.

The same off-colored or raunchy stories are told.

The same vulgar language is used and the Lord's names are used in the same vain way.

They have the same selfish use of money -with no regard for the work of the Kingdom. or for that matter even the needs of others in any significant way.

Why? A crisis of knowledge.

Even professing Christians don't know the Scriptures!

You might say, "Christians know the Bible, they just don't obey it!"

I think there may have been a time when that was true, but I don't think so any more.

There was a time when Biblical principles and values were taught in the church, the home and the schools and were supported in the media. "Leave it To Beaver", "Father Knows Best", "Bonanza" and even "Gunsmoke" NO LONGER.

The anti-Christian bias of prime-time television has been amply documented by even sources in the secular media.

The assault on teaching Christian truth in the schools has long been recognized - even so that we no longer even expect it.

The home for too many of our children is not a source of Biblical teaching - even among Christian parents there is no time or inclination to do it.

And too many churches have ceased to believe the Bible:

Several years ago, Western Reserve University asked several hundred pastors if they believed that the Bible was in anyway the inspired Word of God?

89% of Episcopalians said "no"

82% of the Methodist pastors said "no"

81% of what then was known as the United Presbyterian pastors said, "no"

57% of the Baptists and Lutherans said "no"

And even though many more laymen than pastors believe that the Bible is the Word of God, is it any wonder that there is a crisis of knowledge about the Holy Scriptures?

Even in Evangelical churches, are we so busy communicating a "feel-good" Christianity and a "how-to" religion that we aren't teaching people the Bible?

Is much of our so-called "teaching" in Sunday School and from the pulpit little more than popular psychology dressed in "God words" designed to help nice people be happy and successful?

When I see and hear what is going on in the lives of the people of our churches, I can only draw one conclusion:

People don't know the Holy Scriptures!

It's not just that they don't obey it, they don't know it.

They haven't studied it, meditated on it, let it sink into their consciences.

If I was to ask "How does your Lord feel about such and such", they wouldn't know.

At best they would have a second-hand knowledge - "Well doesn't the church teach ..."

NO! that is not the answer, These are life issues and death issues - YOU need to know what God says.

Over the last 8-10 weeks we have been studying the book of ACTS.

On the day of Pentecost the Apostle Peter stood before a great crowd of people in Jerusalem and preached a sermon.

In Acts 2:41 we learn that 3000 of them accepted the message of Christ as Saving-Lord and were added to the church.

The Holy Spirit, as I preached last week, had come in a new way. He was present with them - the person of God the Holy Spirit was permanently in them.

That new congregation of spirit filled believers is described in Acts 2:42-47:

What kind of people are these new Christians?

What do people who have been saved by Jesus and indwelled by the Holy Spirit of God do?

Under the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit, we see them responding in four ways in this text:

Learning - Cultivating a relationship with Christ.
Worshipping - Celebrating
Evangelizing - Communicating
Loving - Caring

Today I want us to look at "The learning Church"

ACTS 2:42a "They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching."

The word "devoted" means:

They were steadfast in it.

They persevered in it.

They were continually doing it.

They gave themselves to studying what the Apostles were teaching.

On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit opened a school for 3000 people and they began to study.

My appeal today is simple:

I am calling many of you to become students of the Bible.
Are you devoted to the Holy Scriptures?

I want to give you several reasons why it is so important that you are - that you know the Holy Scriptures.

1. Without the truth from the Holy Scriptures you cannot be a Christian?

One becomes a Christian by God's grace through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

I believe that Jesus is GOD and that on a particular day in a particular place He died on a cross paying the penalty for MY SIN.

I believe that He rose again from the dead demonstrating His power as sovereign Lord.

I believe that when I trust Him to forgive me based on His death as He promised he would, He causes me to become a Christian/ A child of God/ saved.

There is a lot of content, information, knowledge to that faith.

I don't just believe - I believe SOMEONE and what they did.

Without knowledge of who Jesus is and what He did, a person cannot become a Christian.

Look at Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-36 - It is all about Jesus.

And when He calls on them to respond what does it say in verse 41 they did?

"They accepted his message" they accepted something specific - the message about Jesus!

To many of you, this seems elementary - and it is. BUT I am appalled at how many people profess to be Christians who have no idea of what one must believe to be a Christian.

When you ask, "How did you become a Christian?" the answers reveal an ignorance of the truth of the Bible.

"I believe in God"

"I go to church"

"I believe that Jesus died and rose again"

"God loves everybody"
"I was baptized"
"I was confirmed"
"I went forward in a Billy Graham Crusade"
"I prayed to God"

What people lack is truth, the truth of the Scriptures about how one becomes a Christian.

I recently saw the play, "A Raisin in the Sun" about a black family in the 1950s in Chicago.

In that story the matriarch of the family is asked by her son to join him in taking financial advantage of another person. Her response is "I don't want that on my ledger when I stand before God".

Her words reveal her faulty theology: God is keeping a ledger with pluses and minuses and she will be o.k. with God as long as her pluses outnumber her minuses.

Her theology is the theology of far too many even in our church. **AND IT IS FALSE NOT TRUE.**

Some time ago, an elderly lady of our church who was in a nursing home, said, "I don't know what I did wrong that God would put me in here."

Now while I have no good reason to question her conversion based on that one comment, it does make me nervous.

For if she believes it is her sin that causes God to punish her, does she also believe that it is her goodness that causes God to love her - and by her goodness does she earn her relationship to God?

That theology is wrong!
There is a lack of knowledge there.

Without the truth from the Scriptures you can't be a Christian.

There are people who assume they are Christians because right now everything seems o.k.

They are comfortable in life and somehow they deduce then that everything is all right.

Millard Ericksen suggests that that is a bit like a man who falls from a ten story building and as he passes windows on each floor he yells out, "I'm doing fine". And he may mean it but eventually the truth will catch up to his experience.

(Ericksen's Theology vol 1)

There may be some here this morning that are assuming that everything is o.k. between you and God because right now you are feeling no pain - life is comfortable.

But your relationship to God is not based on how everything seems - it is based on truth.

Paul said to Timothy, "From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation."

The Bible says, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God"

Again, I ask you, Do you know the Holy Scriptures?

Without the truth of the Bible you can't be a Christian.

2. A second reason why you must know the holy Scriptures is that without the truth of the Bible you cannot grow as a Christian - you can't grow to be more like Christ.

2 Tim 3:16 says, "All Scripture is given by God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness."

King David said, "How shall a young man keep his way pure, by living according to your word, I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you (Lord)."

One of the major purposes of the Bible is to show God's people how to lead a life that pleases God and consequently fulfills God's purpose for their lives.

Jesus said it this way, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."
It is by truth that we are liberated from sinful actions and thoughts.

But we can't begin to live the way God wants us to if we don't know what God wants.

John Owen said, "That good which the mind cannot discover, the will cannot choose, nor the affections cleave unto."

In other words, "If you don't know what to do you can't possibly choose it and love it"

If we are ever going to grow in Christ-likeness we must be people of the Word - people who study it to determine our Master's will.

Too many of the students and adults of our church, many times, are living unholy because they are ignorant of what God truly teaches about certain things.

And even if they have heard what God says about those things, they have never stopped long enough to meditate on those things, to ponder the implications of those things, to let the truth slowly sink in and change their minds and consequently their actions.

Again King David it was who said, "Oh how I love your law, I meditate on it all day long"

I say to you who are truly Christians, trusting in Christ Jesus as Saving Lord, until you get into the Word and regularly study it, meditating on its implications for your lives, you will not grow as a Christian.

And I would say, as I did a couple of weeks ago, If there is no craving at all for the Word of God, no desire at all for the Will of God in your life - you may have serious reason to doubt if you are even a Christian.

Do you know the Holy Scriptures? Without the truth of the Word you cannot live a holy life.

3. The third reason why it is so important that you know the Holy Scriptures is that, without the truth of the Scriptures you will not be able to remain standing in the storms of life.

I don't think we really know what a person believes until we see him or her in crisis.

The Apostle Paul said, "Neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come, nothing shall be able to separate us from the Love of God which is in Christ Jesus"

He also told the Thessalonian Christians that when a friend or relative who loves Jesus dies, the remaining Christians should not grieve as those who have no hope - for we know that since Jesus rose from the dead so too he has promised that those who trust in Him will be raised from the dead and we shall be physically with them when Jesus comes again.

Though the pain of loss is still almost unbearably great when a loved one dies, I can tell the difference between those who KNOW the Holy Scriptures and those who have only vague ideas about death and life beyond the grave.

It is truth, truth from God that sustains people in the crises of life.

In my 23 years in the pastorate I have watched many people:
face their own death,
face the death of loved ones,
face financial ruin,
face debilitating diseases,

face discrimination and abuse,
face persecution in their jobs or families for their belief in Jesus,

And I can tell you that there is a great difference between those who know the Holy Scriptures and those who do not.

Those who know the Scriptures:

believe that God is sovereign in every situation,
believe that justice will prevail eventually (God is not mocked, what you sow you will reap)

believe that God is with them even when it is the darkest and there is no apparent evidence of His presence.

And they believe that based on the TRUTH of Scripture.

The late Dr. D. Martin Lloyd-Jones quoted the passage in the "sermon on the mount" where it says, "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, o men of little faith?"

He then commented: "Faith according to our Lord's teaching in this paragraph is primarily thinking; and the whole trouble with a person of little faith is that he or she doesn't think.

Christian faith is essentially a thinking faith. Look at the birds, think about them and draw your conclusions. Look at the grass and the lilies of the field, consider them.

Faith amidst the crises of life is the result of reasonable thinking about the truths that God has revealed in His Word about Himself and about us.

People who don't know the Holy Scriptures can't have the faith that they need in crises of life.

If you want to be able to stand in the storms of life you must know the Scriptures. Do you?

Oh, there is so much more I could say,

Without the truth of the Holy Scriptures:

You cannot know the will of God for your life

You cannot help others come to know Christ as Saving Lord,

You cannot avoid false beliefs but will fall prey to them.

On that one let me say a word: I am troubled by how many professing Christians don't know why they are not Mormons, or Jehovah's Witnesses, or New Agers, or for that matter why they are not of some other major Religion.

I am always deeply disappointed in my own preaching and the teaching of this church when I see people leave after years here and they go to a church that teaches doctrines diametrically opposed to what we teach.

I say, "They never heard!" and "We never taught them!"

Is it important that you know the Holy Scriptures?

It is vitally important:

Without the truth of God's Word:

You can't be a Christian,

You can't grow in holiness,

You can't remain standing in the crises of life,

Like prayer, study of God's word is not an option for the Christian - the Scriptures are our lifeline - they are God's Word to us.

Again, I ask you, are you a student of God's word? Will you determine today that the Scriptures are too important to your life to simply ignore them?

Will you begin a regular time of personal study of God's Word?

Those first Christians "devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching", **will you?**