

## GOD'S WORD AND OUR INHERITANCE

- A. Introduction: Before the break we were working on a series about a prayer Paul regularly prayed for Christians to whom he was very close. He had established the church at Ephesus and spent more time personally instructing them than any other group. Eph 1:16-19; Acts 20:31
1. Paul's prayer gives us insight into what he considered vital for Christians to know. He prayed that they would have insight and revelation from God in three specific areas: The hope of God's calling, the riches of His inheritance in the saints, and the greatness of His power to and in us.
  2. We spent a considerable amount of time talking about the hope to which God has called us. God has a plan and has invited every human into His purpose. Knowledge of this "big picture" is a source of tremendous hope that helps us deal with the challenges of life in a fallen world.
    - a. God's plan was and is to have a family of sons and daughters with whom He can dwell. He made the earth to be a home for Himself and His family. Eph 1:4,5; Isa 45:18
    - b. When Adam sinned he and the race resident in him went into the pigpen of sin, corruption and death. God immediately began to unveil His plan of redemption, His plan to deliver men and the earth from this condition and carry out His original purpose. Rev 13:8; Gen 3:15; Luke 19:10
      1. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin so it can be removed and sinners can be transformed into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ and His sacrifice. John 1:12; I John 5:1; etc.
      2. Jesus will come again to cleanse the family home (earth) from all corruption and death and establish His visible kingdom here. God and His family will live forever on earth made new. The Bible begins and ends with God on earth with His family. Gen 2:8-25; 3:8; Rev 21:3
    - c. When you learn to see life in terms of this big picture it gives you hope because you realize that there's more to life than just this life, the hardships and suffering of life don't begin to compare to what's ahead, and all will be made right in the life to come. Rom 8:18; II Cor 4:17,18; etc.
      1. This doesn't mean there's no help or provision for this life. But knowledge of the big picture makes it easier to access God's help because it puts you in a position of faith and confidence.
      2. Old Testament saints did great exploits for God through faith. Yet their perspective, their mindset, was that they were only passing through this life as it is. Heb 11:33,34; 13-16
  3. Part of the hope given by God's call comes from the fact that, as sons and daughters of God, we have an inheritance. Our inheritance is everything God has provided for us in this life and the life to come. Before we discuss our inheritance we must introduce another element to our study. Acts 20:32
    - a. The time came for Paul to leave Ephesus and go to Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit had alerted him to the fact that jail and suffering lay ahead. He knew he would not see these people again in this life.
      1. He met with the church elders (those who would care for the church he established). In his last face-to-face words to them he entrusted them to God care and protection and to His Word.
      2. According to Paul God's Word would build them up and give them their inheritance. God works in our lives by His grace through our faith. His Word tells us what He has done for us through Jesus and when we believe it, we experience it (whole lessons for another day).
      3. The point for right now is this: To walk in the provisions of your inheritance you must have knowledge from God's Word.
    - b. I want to begin this year by once again encouraging you to become a regular Bible reader. This is the greatest gift you can give yourself. In this lesson we'll address issues raised by this statement.
- B. People struggle with reading the Bible for a number of reasons: They don't know what it is or what it's for. They don't know how to approach it and are quickly overwhelmed. They don't understand it and or don't get from it what they were expecting.
1. Part of that comes from false expectations about the Bible's purpose. The Bible isn't a love letter from Daddy God. It's not a book of promises or a collection of wise sayings. It wasn't written to help you

live a successful life. The Bible was written to reveal God and His plan of redemption.

- a. Bible comes from a word that means books. The Bible is a collection of 66 books and letters that together tell the story of God's desire for a family and the lengths to which He has gone to obtain that family through Jesus. Every book and letter adds to or advances the story of redemption.
  - b. When Adam sinned and God's purpose for man and the earth was taken off track, the Lord began to unveil His plan of redemption with the promise of a coming Redeemer who would undo the damage and reclaim God's family (Gen 3:15). And He instructed men to keep written records as He gradually revealed more of His plan (Gen 5:1).
2. The Bible is 50% history, 25% prophecy, and 25% instruction for living. This written record is divided into two major sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament.
    - a. The Old Testament is made up of 39 books. Genesis 12-Esther 10 records history of the people through whom Jesus came into this world, the descendants of Abraham (or Israel, Hebrews, Jews).
      1. It is redemptive history. It doesn't list everything that happened to everybody—just events and people that relate to the unfolding plan of redemption.
        2. The action and events recorded in the Bible unfolded in the lands of the Middle East centering on modern-day Israel. Many of the references seem strange to us because we aren't familiar with the geography or the customs of that area and the time periods described.
          - A. The poetry books (Job through Song of Solomon) and the books of the prophets (Isaiah through Malachi) were all written during the period covered by the history books.
          - B. The Old Testament was completed 400 years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem.
      - b. The New Testament consists of 27 writings. All were written by eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry, death, burial and resurrection (or a close associate of an eyewitness).
        1. The Gospels are selective biographies of Jesus' life ending with His death and resurrection. Acts is a record of the apostles as they went out to preach Jesus and the resurrection.
        2. The epistles are letters written to those who became Christians through the ministries of the apostles. They deal with what we believe and how we're to live. Revelation is a vision given to John of events in Heaven and on earth in the last few years leading up to Jesus' return. It ends with the completion of the plan, earth made new and God on earth with His family.
      - c. The Bible is not a "mystical book". It is a record of God's interaction with men as He has worked out His plan to have a family. It tells of real people and real events, verifiable through secular historical records and through archaeology (lessons for another day).
        1. Everything in the Bible was spoken or written by someone to someone about something. Those three facts set the context. Bible passages can't mean something to us that they would not have meant to the people to whom they were first written.
        2. The Bible isn't a collection of independent, unrelated verses. Chapter and verse divisions were added centuries after the Bible was completed for reference purposes.
        3. People tend to think of scriptures in terms of: What does it mean to me? It doesn't matter what it means to you. What matters is: What does it say? What was the person who wrote the words trying to say?
3. God has given us His book to reveal Himself—His person and His plan, His will and His purposes.
    - a. Jesus is the Word of God (John 1:1,14). The written Word of God reveals the Living Word.
      1. The Old Testament points to the coming Redeemer through numerous prophecies as well as types and shadows (real people and events that picture some aspect of the person or work of Jesus). The New Testament is the revelation of the Redeemer's arrival and redemptive work.
      2. Jesus confirmed that the Old Testament points to Him. In a conversation with the religious leaders of His day He reported that Moses wrote about Him. John 5:39,46
      3. The Bible is progressive revelation. God has gradually revealed Himself and His plan through the pages of scripture. The Old Testament must be read in the light of the New Testament and Jesus death, burial and resurrection. Heb 1:1,2

- b. The written Word of God is our only 100% reliable source of information about God and His purposes. It trumps emotions, circumstances and supernatural manifestations.
  - 1. Luke 24:25-27; 44-45--On Resurrection Day the risen, glorified Lord Jesus Christ used the scriptures to confirm that He was and is the promised Redeemer.
  - 2. II Pet 1:16-19--Peter, in his last letter before he was martyred for his faith in Christ, wrote that, even though we have seen with our eyes the glory of the Lord, we have a more sure word that Jesus is who He says He is—the scriptures.
- c. Any supernatural manifestation that is genuinely of God must be fully confirmed by the Bible. If it is contrary to the written Word of God, we reject it.
- 4. This is particularly important because of the times in which we live, what seems to be the end of this age and the soon return of Jesus, a time that will be marked by great deception.
  - a. In Matt 24:5,11,24, in response to questions about what signs will indicate His return is near, Jesus gave a lengthy answer. But He repeated one sign multiple times: religious deception. (We'll discuss this in detail in an upcoming lesson.)
  - b. I Tim 4:1,2; II Tim 3:1-5--Paul echoed the Lord's words. He told his son in the faith, Timothy, that wickedness and deception will get worse and worse until the Lord comes. But Paul also told Timothy (and us) that his (our) protection against the wickedness and deception of the final hour of this age is the Word of God (II Tim 3:13-15).
    - 1. The scripture Timothy knew from childhood was what we know as the Old Testament. But notice, Paul confirms that its purpose is to point men to the salvation that is in Jesus Christ. Scripture also includes the New Testament which was in the process of being written.
    - 2. This is a whole lesson for another day, but consider this point also. Paul was personally taught the gospel he preached by Jesus Himself (Gal 1:11,12). And Jesus revealed a number of mysteries to him (a mystery is a previously unrevealed aspect of the plan of God ). Paul was also given the privilege of writing two-thirds of the New Testament (proportionately). His writings were recognized by Peter and the others as scripture (II Pet 3:16).
  - c. Paul followed his statement about continuing in the Word of God with one of the best known passages about the scripture, its origin and its purpose. II Tim 3:16,17
    - 1. The Bible doesn't simply contain the words of God. It IS the Word of God given to men by inspiration. Inspiration is THEOPNEUSTOS in the Greek, made up of two words: THEOS (God) and PNEO (to breathe or blow). The scriptures were literally breathed by God.
    - 2. All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is useful for teaching the faith and correcting error, for re-setting the direction of a man's life and training him in good living. The scriptures are the comprehensive equipment of the man of God, and fit him fully for all branches of his work. (Phillips)
- C. As I said at the beginning of the lesson, the greatest gift you can give yourself is to become a regular reader of the Bible, particularly the New Testament. Let me give you some real practical advice on how to approach it.
  - 1. For most people, reading the Bible means reading random verses. We open it up and start to read wherever our eyes land, hoping to get a "good" verse that will pep us up or give us an answer to our immediate crisis. But, like any other book or letter, the Bible wasn't written to be read that way.
    - a. If you sent me a six page letter, is this how you would want me to read it: First I read a sentence in the middle of page five. Then I read two sentences at the beginning of page three. Next I read a part of a line from page one. Lastly I read another sentence on page one, close the letter and announce that I've read it.
    - b. Not only would I not understand the point and purpose of your letter, it's possible that I may draw really wrong conclusions because I've taken random verses out of context. Yet, that's how we read the Bible. No wonder we don't understand it or get much out of it.

2. We're at the beginning of a new year. I want to challenge you to become a regular, systematic reader of the New Testament. By that I mean: Read each book from start to finish.
  - a. Don't skip around. Don't stop and look up a bunches of words or consult the commentaries. Just read. The point is to become familiar with it. Understanding comes with familiarity.
  - b. Set aside ten to fifteen minutes time each day (or as close to that as possible) and read as much as you can. Leave a marker there and pick up where you left off the next day. Try to read some of the smaller epistles in just one sitting.
  - c. This doesn't mean you can't ever skip around or look up things in a commentary. But do that at another time besides this regular, systematic reading.
3. The Bible is a supernatural book that will affect and change you. It works in us, imparts things to us. Consider these statements about what God's Word will do for you and in you.
  - a. Matt 4:4--Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God. I Pet 2:2--Desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. God's Word is food for the inner man. It produces growth in us.
  - b. James 1:21--Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. God's Word is able to deliver your soul (your mental and emotional faculties from the corruption and damage done to it through growing up in a sin cursed earth.
  - c. Rom 10:17--So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. It imparts faith to those who hear it.
  - d. I John 2:14--I have written to you who are young because you are strong with God's Word living in your hearts (NLT). It imparts strength to you.
  - e. I Thess 2:13--The word of God which effectually worketh also in you that believe. It works in us, builds us up.
  - f. Prov 4:20-22--Never lose sight of (My Words) but fix them in your minds; to those who find them, they are life, and health to all their being (Moffatt). It imparts life to our whole being.
  - g. Prov 6:21-23--Keep (My Words) always in your heart...Wherever you walk, their counsel can lead you. When you sleep, they will protect you. When you wake up in the morning, they will advise you. For these commandments and this teaching are a lamp to light the way ahead of you (NLT).  
The number one way God speaks to us is through His written word.

D. Conclusion: There are many sub-topics to discuss under each of these points (later lessons). But as we begin this series, remember our starting point. We have an inheritance in Christ and God gives it to us through His Word (later lessons). If you will commit to reading the New Testament regularly and systematically, you'll be a different person a year from now. Your inheritance will be real to you in a way that it is not now. More next week!