

PLEASE READ THE NEW TESTAMENT

- A. Introduction: Eph 1:16-23--We're looking at a prayer Paul prayed regularly for Christians. The prayer reveals what Paul considered important for believers to know. In the last lesson we began to talk about his desire that Christians would have knowledge and insight into the riches of their inheritance in Christ (v18).
1. As sons and daughters of God we have an inheritance that includes all we need to live this life and the life to come. We'll discuss our inheritance in later lessons. But first we need some background.
 - a. Acts 20:32--The last time Paul saw the people to whom he wrote the words in his prayer he entrusted them to God's care and protection and to Word of God. According to Paul, God's Word would build them up and give them their inheritance.
 - b. There are many lessons for another day in this statement. But, here's the point for now: To walk in the provisions of our inheritance we must have knowledge from God's Word.
 1. God works in our lives by His grace through our faith. He gives us His Word about what He has done, is doing and will do. When we believe what He says, it comes to pass in our lives.
 2. Our inheritance comes to us through God's Word. The Living Word (Jesus) purchased it for us at the Cross. The Written Word tells us about it. When we believe it, we experience it.
 3. Knowledge of what the Lord has provided as well as faith to access what is provided comes from the Word of God. Rom 10:17
 2. The greatest gift you can give yourself is to become a regular, systematic Bible reader, particularly the New Testament. 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.
 - a. For most people, reading the Bible means reading devotionals or books about the Bible. There's nothing wrong with either of those, but it's not the same as reading the Bible.
 - b. Or we play Bible roulette. We open it up and read a few random passages wherever our eyes land.
 1. But the Bible isn't a collection of independent, unrelated verses. It's actually a collection of 66 books and letters which together tell the story of God's desire for a family and the lengths to which He's gone to obtain it through Jesus.
 2. Each book and letter is meant to be read from start to finish the way we read any other book or letter. Each one adds to or advances the story of redemption in some way. Each was written by someone to someone about something. Those factors set the context. Scripture can't mean something to us that it would not have meant to the first readers.
 3. We think of the Bible 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 writer trying to say? II Pet 1:20
 - c. When I say read systematically I mean: Read each book from start to finish. Don't skip around or stop to look up words or consult a commentary. Don't worry about what you don't understand. Just read. The point is to become familiar with it. Understanding comes with familiarity.
 1. This doesn't mean you can't ever skip around and read random verses or look up things in a commentary. But do that at another time besides this regular, systematic reading time.
 2. 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 the next day, pick up where you left off. Try to read some of the smaller epistles in just one sitting.
 3. I can hear the collective sighs coming from the audience as I teach this. I know what you're thinking: The Bible is boring. I don't understand it or get anything out of it. I need REAL help and this isn't it.
 - a. People often ask me how I got to where I am in terms of knowledge of the Bible. I did what I'm telling you to do. When I became a Christian, I didn't know I would end up in full time ministry as a Bible teacher. I just wanted to know Jesus. The Written Word reveals the Living Word.
 - b. I thank God my brother told me to do what I'm telling you. I began to read the New Testament cover to cover, over and over. I didn't understand it any more than you do. But understanding gradually came. It set me on the right course and produced the foundation for what I do now.

c. I want to spend the rest of this lesson giving you additional reasons as to why you need to become a regular, systematic reader of the New Testament. (I'm not leaving the Old Testament out. But you'll get much more out of the Old Testament if you first get familiar with the New Testament.)

B. The Bible is no ordinary book. It's a supernatural book that produces transformation. Supernatural means of or relating to an order of existence beyond the visible, observable universe.

1. The ultimate goal of salvation is transformation by the power of God. This transformation will result in a restoration of God's original plan to have a family with whom He can dwell on this earth

a. Through the supernatural power of God administered by the Word of God and the Spirit of God sinners are transformed into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God and the earth is restored to a fit forever home for God and His family. (We discussed this in great detail last year.)

1. This is how God has worked since the beginning of time. The Spirit of God and the Word of God produced the visible creation. Gen 1:1-3 (lots in this passage we aren't dealing with now)

2. This is how God continues to work in the world He created, by His power administered through His Spirit and His Word.

A. That's how we were saved in the first place. The Word of God was preached to us (Jesus died for our sins and rose again). We believed it, acknowledging Jesus as Savior and Lord, and we experienced the provision of salvation. Eph 2:8,9; Rom 10:9,10

B. Transformation took place in our innermost being and we were born again or born from above by the Spirit of God and the Word of God. John 3:3,5; I Pet 1:23

b. Jesus is the pattern for God's family (Rom 8:29,30). The new birth is the beginning of a process that will ultimately conform us to the image of Christ in character and power. God continues to work in our lives and produce transformation by His Spirit through His Word.

1. John 6:63--All the words through which I have offered myself to you are meant to be channels of the spirit and of life to you, since in believing these words you would be brought into contact with the life in me. (Riggs)

2. II Cor 3:18--And all of us, as with unveiled face, [because we] continued to behold [in the Word of God] as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are constantly being transfigured into His very own image in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another; [for this comes] from the Lord [Who is] the Spirit. (Amp)

3. God, by His Spirit, strengthens us through His Word in us (I Thess 2:13). His Word is food for our inner man. We're nourished and built up by it (Matt 4:4; I Pet 2:2), strengthened by it (I John 2:14), changed by it (James 1:21). His Word enlightens our minds and speaks to us (Prov 6:29-23; Ps 119:105).

A. Jer 15:16--Your words were found and I ate them, and Your word was to me a joy and the rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O Lord, God of hosts. (Amp)

B. The Word of God is compared to food to help us understand a supernatural process. You don't need to know how food works, but you do have to eat. You don't have to understand how the Bible produces transformation. You just need to read.

2. God works in our lives according to what we believe. You can't believe what you don't know. Most people think they know the Bible. But how can you if you haven't read it and aren't familiar with it?

a. Many sincerely think they read it because they read random verses. Or they complete one of those "read through the Bible in a year" programs. Although that is commendable, it doesn't make you familiar with the Bible. Understanding comes from familiarity.

b. Many sincere Christians believe verses that have been taken out of context (but they don't know it). Consequently, they think they've got a promise for something, but it's a false expectation because they're not promised what they're "believing". A classic example is Luke 6:38.

1. It's quoted at offering time to say that God will give back to you more than you give. So, give all you can!! This verse has nothing to do with money. Those who first heard Jesus utter the

words two thousand years ago would not have been motivated to dig a little deeper.

2. When we read the context we find out that Jesus was talking about how to treat other people.

We're to be kind, merciful and forgiving as is our Heavenly Father. What we give out relationally we'll get back only more so. Luke 6:27-38

3. Matt 19:29--A hundredfold return on giving is preached based on misinterpretation of a verse.

Jesus promised His disciples whatever they gave up to follow him they'll get back many times over, some in this life and some in the life to come. It has nothing to do with getting money.

3. What you believe comes out of your perception of reality. Christians are instructed to renew their mind or change their view of reality. A renewed mind sees reality as it is according to God. Rom 12:2

a. Regular reading of the Bible will change the way you see things and give you a framework from which to understand and deal with life. As your view of reality changes, it'll change how you live.

b. If you get to the point where you truly believe that nothing can come against you that's bigger than God, it will give you a stability that will hold you steady no matter what comes your way.

1. The apostle Paul was unconquerable as he faced the challenges of life. He said that "I have come through a process of persuasion to the settled conclusion that" nothing can separate me from the love of God (Rom 8:38, Wuest). Such persuasion comes from the Word of God.

2. The Bible is filled with examples of people who faced the same situation with two different outcomes—one good, one not. In each case the difference was God's Word. They got their picture of reality from what God said, were persuaded of it, and experienced victory.

A. Num 13,14--God gave Israel an inheritance, the land of Canaan. But out of an entire generation only two men (Joshua and Caleb) took possession of it. Their view of reality was shaped by God's Word. He says we can take the land, so let's do it.

B. I Sam 17--Part of their inheritance once they settled the land was victory over invading armies. When Goliath came against Israel only David believed what God said. His view of reality in the face of his enemy was shaped by God's Word, and he triumphed.

C. Let's talk some more about why we should focus on the New Testament. As we said last week the New Testament records the fulfillment of what the Old Testament pointed to, the coming of Jesus. Heb 1:1,2

1. The first four books (gospels) are selective biographies of Jesus written so that men would believe on Jesus (John 20:31). They focus on His three year ministry culminating in His death and resurrection.

When all the events are harmonized (nothing repeated or left out) they cover about 50 days.

a. The gospels are a record of Jesus' words and works. They show us who Jesus is. Jesus is God and shows us God. He was and is the will of God in action. He said of Himself: If you've seen me, you've seen the Father. I only do what I see my Father do. John 14:9,10; 8:28; 5:19

b. The Written Word is the only 100% reliable picture we have of Jesus. This is particularly important because of the time in which we live. We're coming to the end of this age. It will culminate in Satan offering a false messiah to the world.

2. The epistles were written to the first Christians to tell them what we believe and how we are to live. Some of it is strange to us because they deal with issues that arose among this first generation.

a. Should we eat meat offered to idols? What is the place of the Law of Moses? Some of it deals with specific questions and problems that arose in these communities of believers. Parts were written to remind readers of what the writer had taught them when he was present with them.

1. But as you become familiar with the text through regular reading it starts to make sense. And, this doesn't mean you can't get help from the Bible for your present tense issues.

2. When I was a young Christian, someone I care about was badly hurt by a fellow believer who caused great damage to my friend's life and reputation. This person was also involved in big sin at the same time they were leading worship in a church. I struggled with all of it.

A. While praying in other tongues to try to find relief, the thought came to me: They have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge (Rom 10:2). It instantly brought me peace.

- B. This passage has nothing to do with relational issues. Paul was explaining the place of the Jews since, as a nation, they had rejected their Messiah. However, because I had read it, the Holy Spirit was able to personally apply it and help me in my time of need.
- b. Regular reading of the epistles will give you a picture of what it looks like to live as a Christian in this world and will help you recognize teachings that aren't in the New Testament or contradict it.
1. Being a Christian is like putting a puzzle together. You get saved and start listening to sermons in church, on TV, on CD. But nobody show you the picture on the box. Therefore, it's hard to put the pieces in place. And, it's very difficult to recognize a picture that doesn't belong in the puzzle. Systematic reading will help you see the picture on the box.
 2. This is the framework you'll get from the epistles (lessons for another day). If this becomes your view of reality fear will vanish and you will overcome in life's challenges.
 - A. We're only passing through this world as it is. The greater and better part of life is ahead.
 - B. Eternal things matter more than temporal or temporary things.
 - C. God is much more interested in you developing Christ-like character than He is in where you live, what job you have, who you marry or what ministry you're in.
 - D. The most important thing you can do in this life is shine the light of Jesus in your world.
 3. We live in a unique time. The return of Jesus is near and He said the hallmark of the years will be false Messiahs (Matt 24:5,11,24) Accurate knowledge from the Bible is our protection against deception.
 - a. As the world increasingly abandons God, they are discarding truth because God is the Truth. He is the standard by which everything else is judged. Rom 1:18; Rom 1:25; John 14:6; John 17:17
 1. Absolute truth as a concept has been largely been discarded. It's not unusual to hear people say: That's your truth, not mine. We've raised several generations of youth to whom to whom objective facts don't matter. It's what you feel that matters. Prov 28:26
 2. The Oxford Dictionary selected "post-truth" as 2016's international word of the year. They do this yearly to show ways in which our language is changing in response to current events.
 3. Post-truth is defined as: relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion that appeals to emotion and personal belief.
 - b. This kind of thinking is creeping into Christian circles. This statement was recently brought to my attention. It was being shared on face book by Christians and non-Christians: If Jesus were here He'd tell us to love each other. That's an emotional statement as opposed to a truth statement.
 1. If you're familiar with the Gospels you know that statement is inaccurate. It's also quite misleading. If Jesus were here He'd say what He said to people when He was on earth.
 2. These are some of His words: Repent, for the kingdom is at hand. Take up your Cross and follow Me. I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. Matt 4:17; Matt 16:24; John 14:6
- D. Conclusion: Let's close with this thought. Regular, systematic reading of the New Testament will give you an accurate picture of who Jesus is and how we're supposed to live. Lots more next week!!