

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 7/19/92

Acts 17:11 "How to Study the Bible"

Handout: (Hendricks, 17 "How About You?")

Intro: The Bible can change your life. Do you believe that? That's a pretty bold claim. Illust: Like the story of the high pressure vacuum salesman (MacArth 11)

The Bible can change your life! The Bible remains the perennial best seller in America. Great men in history have testified to the greatness of the Bible.

Quotes: Sumner, 5-6

Problem: Many Christians struggle when it comes to Bible Study.

Why is that? Various reasons. For starters, it can be intimidating. In his book Does It Really Work, David Hubbard made the following observations. The Bible contains 66 books, written over a span of more than 1300 years. The authors lived in places like Mesopotamia, Palestine, Asia Minor, and Italy. Some of the Bible was written from dungeons and prison cells (parts of Jeremiah and a few of Paul's letters). Other parts were composed in the comfort and luxury of royal palaces (eg--Daniel).

Add to that the variety of literary forms. There are short stories like Ruth and Esther. Family histories such as in Gen 12-50. Court records by royal scribes in Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. The Bible includes prayers, hymns, and proverbs. There are love songs, wedding songs, work songs, harvest songs. Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah used battle commands and courtroom language to communicate their message. Then you'll find dreams, parables, visions, letters, prophecies, commandments, narratives, and exhortations. The Bible is a goldmine of literature. Yet that can be intimidating.

Illust: In 1951 the Princeton University Press published a book not one single person in the world could read. Still to this day! Called the "Pylos Tablets." It's a transcription of an unknown language found on a clay tablet in some greek ruins. It was published with the hopes that some scholar might decipher it.

In some ways, the Bible is like the Pylos Tablets to many people. It's an unknown quantity. It's neglected.

Stats: The Barna Research Group reports that in a typical week, only 10% of Americans read the Bible every day.

Stats: Gallup polls confirm the findings. One survey found that 82% of Americans believe that the Bible is either the literal or inspired Word of God. More than half said they read it at least monthly. Yet half couldn't name even one of the 4 gospels. And fewer than half knew who delivered the Sermon on the Mt (Hend, 10).

Q: What are some of the reasons people give for not studying the Bible?

Discuss:

A: R.C. Sproul in his book, "Knowing Scripture," identifies 2 common myths:

1. Myth #1--The Bible is so DIFFICULT to understand that only highly skilled theologians with technical training can deal with the Scriptures.
2. Myth #2--The Bible is BORING.

You may feel this way. Perhaps the reason is because you've never really learned HOW to study the Bible. Tonight we want to begin a 6 week (or so!) series entitled, "How to Study the Bible."

Our Goals:

1. To enable each person to have a meaningful, personal Bible Study
2. To teach people the process to follow in interpreting and applying the Bible

Q: How can we as a Church and as individual Christians learn to enjoy personal Bible study?

A: Tonight we want to consider the vibrant example of a group of people who knew how to study the Bible. Not American. Lived on the European continent, 19 centuries ago. They lived in the city of Berea. You'll find them in Acts 17:10-12.

Proposition: Let's notice what the Bereans did with the Word of God in Acts 17:10.

I. With the Proclaimed Word of God

- A. Receptivity
- B. Readiness

II. With the Written Word of God

Studied the Scriptures--Study marked by:

- A. Diligence--"searched"
- B. Discipline--"daily"
- C. Discernment--"whether those things were so"

Context:

- Paul's second missionary journey, accompanied by Silas (17:14)
- Hostility in Thessalonica (17:5) forced the Missionary team to leave...

17:10 "And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea..."
Berea. 60 miles from Thess. Tim joined them there. They went to the synagogue, as was customary.

Q: What are we told about the Bereans in comparison with those in Thess?

A: 17:11 "more NOBLE."

Why does Luke say they were more noble? The word can mean "well born" and some have felt Luke has in mind their social standing ("They came from good stock!"). I don't think that's Luke's point.

The word can also be translated, "open-minded." That is, the Bereans were more open-minded than the Thess. Towards what? Towards hearing the Word of God. The reason the Bereans were noble was because of their attitude towards the Word of God.

"...in that they received the Word...and searched the Scriptures..."

Notice 2 different words used with reference to the Word of God.

1. Received the WORD = "logos" = Verbal message

2. Searched the SCRIPTURES = "graphas" = Written message

The Verbal message was the proclamation of Paul concerning the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. The Written message was the OT. The verbal message was later summed up and recorded by the apostles and their associates in what we know as the NT.

Let's look closely at the way the Bereans treated the Word of God.

Q: What did they do with the Word?

I. With the Proclaimed Word of God

I see 2 traits in their attitude towards the Proclaimed Word...

A. Receptivity

V 11 "they received the Word"

They received it. "They" did. Not just the leaders. But across the board, the people were hungry for the Word. As we'll see in a moment, the people in the pew were students of the Book.

Q: Is your life marked by this quality--Receptivity?

I delight to preach God's Word. And especially to certain people that love to hear the Word of God! They drink it in like a cup of cold water on a hot day.

Illust: Helping Gary S. dig his basement...thirst quenching water

The Bereans were receptive. They wanted to hear the Word. But why? You know it's possible to want to hear the Word for wrong reasons. Notice the second trait...

B. Readiness

V 11 "...with all readiness of mind"

"readiness" = eagerness, zeal

But the word means more than that here. Remember the contrast. The Bereans were more noble in the way they received God's Word than whom? Those in Thess.

Q: How did the Thess receive the Word?

See...

17:2 "Paul...reasoned with them out of the Scriptures..."

17:3 "Opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered..."

What happened?

Some believed (4). But others did not (5). In fact they turned the town into a riot. Why? Why were they so upset? Because they were envious (5). But also...

Key: Because what they heard did NOT fit into their system.

17:7 "...saying there is ANOTHER KING..."

Certain Jews in Thess had their theology all figured out. They didn't want Paul to mess it up. So they were closeminded. They refused to receive his message.

Not so the Bereans! They received the Word with "readiness of mind." There was no prejudice, no preconceived commitment to some manmade system.

READINESS.

Application: Don't study the Bible to prove a point. Most of us who have been Christians awhile struggle here. We study the Bible with preconceived pet peaves. We are tempted to study the Bible to prove the theological "system" we have worked so hard and long to build. Listen. Don't do that. Every time I approach the Scriptures, I must do so with an open, ready mind. If my theological system is right, it'll be OK. If not, it needs to change anyway!

Illust:

Q: Does that mean I listen to preaching of the Word of God indiscriminately? That if someone says, "This is what the Bible says," I must agree no questions asked?

Tran: Certainly not. Notice secondly what the Bereans did with...

II. With the Written Word of God

V 11 "...searched the Scriptures daily, whether..."

The Bereans studied the Scriptures. Now it's good to hear the Bible. It's good to read the Bible. But the Bereans **STUDIED** the Bible.

Key: There's a difference between reading the Bible and studying the Bible. Some Christians are faithful Bible readers, but have never been taught **HOW** to study the Bible. That's our objective in this series.

Illust:

The Berean's Study of the Scripture was marked by 3 qualities:

A. Diligence--"searched"

They searched the Scriptures (the OT). Can't you picture it? They went to the synagogue to hear Paul preach. I can just hear those God-fearing Jews talking, "Wow, wasn't that great! That's what I've been looking for all my life! Paul said the Messiah has come!" A friend replies, "We'd better check out his message with the Scriptures!" So they rolled out the scroll.

"He said Jesus was born in Bethlehem."--Yea, that checks out (Micah 5:2)!"

"He said the Messiah had to suffer."--Yes, here it is in Is 53

"He said Jesus rose from the dead."--Yes, Ps 16

"He said Jesus was betrayed by his close friend."--Yes, Ps 41:9

And so the Bereans searched. That speaks of diligence. Why?

Q: How do you "search" the Scriptures?

A: Let's look at some other appearances of the same greek word...

Acts 12:19 "Herod **EXAMINED** the keepers..."

Lk 23:14 (Pilate concerning Jesus to chief priests) "I having **EXAMINED** Him...have found no fault in this man..."

To Search = to conduct an examination; to question

It's a judicial term meaning "an investigation." That's what the Bereans did. They investigated the Scriptures. Listen. You can't study the Bible in a haphazard manner. It demands diligence.

We know how to be diligent in searching for other things...

Illust: Mechanic searching for the right tool

Illust:

It takes diligence to study the Bible.

Q: Are you willing to invest the energy?

B. Discipline--"daily"

The Bereans searched daily. That impresses me. That speaks of discipline. Things in life worth having are worth working for. The Bereans investigated the Scriptures day by day by day.

Bible study is not a Sunday matter. Bible study is a lifelong task and privilege. We need to incorporate it into our lifestyle. It ought to become as natural to us as eating and drinking.

Observation: For me, that means I have to set aside the same time every day. Right after I wake up, shower, I head to the kitchen table, with my Bible. Mornings are best for me now. When I was a teen in school, nights worked better. But ask God to help you be consistent in setting aside a specific time each day.

Illust:

Q: What's the point? Why study the Bible?

C. Discernment--"whether those things were so"

The Bereans went to the Scriptures with a purpose in mind. What was it? To see if what Paul said squared with what God said, as recorded in the OT Scriptures. They went to the Scriptures with a purpose in mind. They didn't... open the Bible wherever it happened to fall, and read. No. They approached their study with this aim in mind--to discern. They wanted to test what they heard with the truth of God's inspired revelation.

Key: Every man's message must be tested, whether it's your pastor or your SS teacher or Charles Swindoll or Charles Stanley. The question to ask is always what? Not, "Did I like it? Did it help me? Did it make me feel good? Do lots of people believe it?" But...

"Is what he just said Scriptural?"

Objection to Bible Study (R.C. Sproul): "Why do I need to study doctrine or theology when all I need to know is Jesus?" Just one question, "Who is Jesus?" As soon as we begin to answer that question, we are involved in doctrine and theology. No Christian can avoid theology. Every Christian is a theologian. Perhaps not in the technical sense, but a theologian nonetheless. Why? We all have opinions about God, about mankind, about life That's theology (just go to the barber shop, or autoparts store and you'll hear theology!). There are good and bad theologians. A good theologian is one who gets his theology from the Bible, from God.

The Bereans "searched" the Scriptures.

See (same word): I Cor 2:14-15

2:14 "The natural man...for they are spiritually DISCERNED."

2:15 "He that is spiritual JUDGES all things."

It takes discernment to study the Scriptures.

Q: Acc to I Cor 2:14, who can discern the Scriptures? Who?

A: Those that have the Spirit, that is, Christians.

Think of the implications:

****All Christians have the ability to discern the Scriptures.**

Not just pastors. Not just those that have been to a Bible College or Seminary (Jn 16:11 "When He, the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all truth...")

****Only Christians have the ability to discern the Scriptures.**

Until a person repents of his sins, believes in Christ, and receives the indwelling Spirit, he will never be able to discern the Scriptures. It will be foolishness to him.

Conclusion:

The Bereans' Bible Study was marked by 3 qualities--Diligence, discipline, and discernment.

Q: What happens when people start studying the Bible?

A: I can't guarantee it will happen in every situation, but look what happened in Berea...

Acts 17:12 "Therefore, many...believed..."

Illust: "What are you doing for evangelism at WBC?..."

Key: I'm convinced that one of the greatest strategies for evangelism given in the NT is right here. Get a church committed to personal Bible study and the community will never be the same!

Illust:

Q: "OK, I see the potential. But how do I study the Bible?"

A: We'll work on that next week!

Challenge for this week: Start by reading a book (eg--Philippians) daily. Read the entire book daily for 7 days.