

Acts 20:17-32 “A Commitment to Preaching the Whole Bible”**

Main Idea: Because of our desire to be a healthy church we are committed to mark #2, biblical theology, that is, to preaching the whole Bible. We’re going to do two things in this message, first look at an example of what that is in Acts 20 and then consider the implications for our church.

I. Biblical Theology: Paul’s example in Acts 20:17-32...

- A. Ministry takes your whole life (18-19, 33-35).
 1. The preacher must be an open book.
 2. The people must see the value of the book.
- B. Ministry takes the whole Bible (20-27).
 1. Paul’s preaching covered everything his hearers needed to hear (20).
 2. Paul’s preaching called for repentance and faith in Jesus (21).
 3. Paul’s preaching magnified the good news of God’s grace (24).
 4. Paul’s preaching explained the centrality of God’s kingdom (25).
 5. Paul’s preaching covered the whole counsel of God (27).
- C. Ministry takes the whole team (28-32).
 1. The shepherds of the church need to do what Paul did (28).
 2. The shepherds of the church need to beware of the danger of defection (29-31).
 3. The church needs shepherds who will teach them to depend totally upon God and His Word

(32).

II. Biblical Theology: Getting serious as a church about the implications...

- A. What is it?
 1. It means we study the whole Bible.
 2. It means we study any text or topic with the whole Bible in mind.
 3. It means we study the Bible with the story of redemption in mind.
- B. What does it take?
 1. It requires that we minister with the mindset of a marathoner.
 2. It requires that those who teach be prepared.
 3. It requires that those who hear be here.
- C. What are the benefits?
 1. It gives us a balanced and complete diet.
 2. It takes us deeper into the knowledge of God.
 3. It results in a maturing congregation.
 4. It creates an openness to talk about difficult subjects.
 5. It equips us to be ambassadors for Christ in a changing world.

Response: Thank God for the Book, *all of it!*

I read an interesting online article in *Christianity Today*, posted May 24, 2010, entitled “Why Johnny Can’t Read the Bible.” Listen to what Collin Hansen had to say:

“Americans love their Bibles. So much so that they keep them in pristine, unopened condition. Or, as George Gallup Jr. and Jim Castelli said in a widely quoted survey finding, “Americans revere the Bible but, by and large, they don’t read it.”

Anecdotes abound. Time magazine observed in a 2007 cover story that only half of U.S. adults could name one of the four Gospels. Fewer than half could identify Genesis as the Bible’s first book. Jay Leno and Stephen Colbert have made sport of Americans’ inability to name the Ten Commandments—even among members of Congress who have pushed to have them posted publicly...

And we know it’s not “those other churches.” We are not surprised by a 2004 Gallup finding that a mere 37 percent of teenagers can find the quotation from the Sermon on the Mount when given four choices. And we are not surprised that only 44 percent of born-again teenagers could do the same.”¹

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ Christianity Today, posted May 24, 2010, “Why Johnny Can’t Read the Bible,” by Collin Hansen

There's never been a day when the church was blessed with more Bibles and Bible study helps, especially for us in America. And yet the statistics don't lie. A tragic majority of Americans who claim to follow Jesus don't know the Book He has given us.

How can that be? There are many factors. One is a mindset that says, "I love Jesus, but I don't need His Book." But how can you know Jesus without the Book? God gave the Book to us so that we might know His Son. There is no other way to know Him.

Another contributing factor is just simply disobedience. In the Great Commission Jesus said, "Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you," but churches have disobeyed that fundamental instruction. Where are His commands? He had His servants write them down *in the Book*. So pastors are supposed to teach the Book, and congregations are supposed to come expecting to learn the Book, and pastors and congregations alike are supposed to dig into the Book throughout the week, and not just to learn it, but to live it. "Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you," said Jesus.

Last week we began a series we're calling, "*Marks of a Healthy Church*." It's not coincidental that the first of the nine marks we are identifying is *expository preaching*. Healthy, Christ-exalting churches make it priority number one to place themselves under the Book, to heed the apostle's command in 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the word."

That's our commitment, my friends. At WBC we are committed to expository preaching. What's that mean? Remember our definition? Expository preaching is *making known the biblical author's intent of a passage so that hearers will understand it and make Christ-exalting application of it in their lives*.

That's what we seek to do in every sermon, every Sunday School lesson, every small group Bible study. We mustn't merely share our opinions, but rather, we must open our Bibles and seek to communicate the point of the author in the text we're reading, with a desire to help our hearers grasp that point and put it into practice in their lives. When that happens, lives change for the honor of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

The second mark takes it a step further. The first mark says we preach our Bibles, not the church creeds, not what the latest sociologist is saying, and certainly not our opinions. We preach *the Bible*.

But what part of the Bible? Our favorite verses and stories? The red letter sections? The epistles? The parts we think are most suitable for modern ears? No. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable..." Jesus said to teach *everything* He commanded. Not some things, but everything. Not parts, but the whole. That's what our second mark is all about. A commitment to *biblical theology*.

The word "theology," which comes from two Greek words (*Theos*, God, and *logia*, meaning "sayings, oracles" and related to *logos*, word) simply means "the study of God." And *biblical* theology means we look to the Bible in our study of God. Since the whole Book has come from God, our curriculum therefore is the whole Book.

I want to make a statement now that I'll explain more fully later. Simply put, we study the whole Book, and we study any part of it with the whole Book in mind. That's what I mean by biblical theology, and that's an essential mark of this church.

I need to warn you. There's a battle raging over the second mark.

A man came to see me in my study one day. I'll never forget what he said. "You should take a poll of the church to find out who wants to hear that doctrine you've been preaching. It's divisive."

I just about came out of my chair. "You don't want a pastor that preaches based on what people want," I replied. "God calls me to preach the whole counsel of His Word,

even the hard parts. And that's what we're doing as we're going through the book of Romans right now."

He's the only person I can think of who ever said it to me. But I'm sure others have *thought* it, or something like it. "Pastor, are you sure it's wise to preach on *that* subject? It's controversial, and it might upset people." Okay, I'll be transparent. I'm not a masochist. I ask myself the same question at times. Why not just preach on subjects that people find palatable?

Parents, you know the answer. Do you feed your little ones only the food they want to eat? Not if you love your kids. You know they need a balanced diet, and you give it to them because your goal is their long-term *health*, not their short term happiness. And that balanced diet includes some things they may not like along the way. Of course, it always helps to let them know that after the carrots are gone, the chocolate cake is coming!

Who knows best what we need in our spiritual diet? Do we, sinners as we are? Or the One who created us, gave His Son to rescue us from hell, and gave us a Book that He says contains everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3)?

So there it is. Because of our desire to be a healthy church we are committed to mark #2, biblical theology, that is, to preaching the whole Bible. I want to do two things in this message, first to show you an example of it in Acts 20, and then consider the implications for our church.

I. Biblical Theology: Paul's example in Acts 20:17-32...

In the book of Acts we see the story of the early church, how the Lord started it, and how it spread, just as He predicted, from Jerusalem, to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). In Acts 20 we find a farewell speech that the apostle Paul gave to the church leaders from Ephesus. It was the Spring of A.D. 57. Paul was on his way to deliver a benevolent offering to the needy saints in Jerusalem, hoping to arrive by Pentecost. His schedule was tight, so he decided not to visit the city of Ephesus again, but rather to call for the elders of the church who met him at the seaport city of Miletus (verse 17).

I need to point out that Paul had already ministered the Word in Ephesus earlier on this trip, for nearly three years. This time it's not the church he addresses, but the leaders. Luke uses the term "elders" in verse 17, *presbutos* in Greek, which refers to a mature man who was selected to serve in a leadership capacity (Acts 14:23). In verse 28 he refers to the same men as "overseers," *episkopos*, a term sometimes translated "bishop." Also in verse 28, to pinpoint their job description, he uses the term "shepherd." The word *pastor* means "shepherd." These men were to "shepherd the flock." In the New Testament these three terms are basically interchangeable and refer to the same person. Thus, when Paul called for the "elders" of the church, he wanted to meet with the spiritually mature men (elders) who led the church (overseers) and shepherded them (pastors) by feeding and leading the believers under their care.

Beginning in verse 18 Luke records this farewell message to the elders. In the book of Acts Luke records some eight messages delivered by Paul. This is the only one addressed to Christians. It's unique because, as Wiersbe points out, "It reveals Paul the pastor rather than Paul the evangelist or Paul the defender of the faith."²

What's it take to do ministry God's way? Based on Paul's example, three things.

² Wiersbe, p. 485-6.

A. Ministry takes your whole life (18-19, 33-35). In other words, it's not a one day a week assignment. Listen to Paul in verses 18-19, "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews."

When I take my car to the mechanic, he fixes it, and I have no idea what he does after he punches the clock at five. It's not my concern. Neither do I know what my doctor does on Saturday afternoon, or how my banker raises his kids. They have a job, and how they live when they're not doing their job isn't my concern.

But being in the ministry isn't like that. It's not a "job," and it truly does take your *whole life*. Paul said to these men, "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you." Friends...

1. *The preacher must be an open book.* This isn't saying he doesn't need some down time, and private time with God and family, but he's a known quantity. He needs to live a life that's consistent with what he preaches.

When Paul was finishing his speech, he hit this theme again in verses 33-35, "I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

This cannot be overstated. Young men, if you're thinking about pursuing the pastorate, please know that ministry takes your whole life. The person who preaches the Book must himself be an open book, for many reasons, and here's a primary one. By God's design, people should be able to look at your life and see something.

2. *The people must see the value of the book.* Notice how Paul reminds the elders of how he suffered. He says he served the Lord in Ephesus "with great humility and tears," and how he was "severely tested by the plots of the Jews." Paul just about got killed in Ephesus, and the fact that he kept on ministering said something compelling. If this message is important enough to die for, it must be pretty important!

Just about anybody with the gift of gab can preach a sermon. But when people see a man who is opening up this Book and paying a price for it, they're learning about its value.

So ministry takes the *whole life*. Secondly...

B. Ministry takes the whole Bible (20-27). Let's take a look at what Paul said he preached during his time in Ephesus. He shares five things about the scope of his preaching in verses 20-27.

1. *Paul's preaching covered everything his hearers needed to hear (20).* "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house."

Don't miss that phrase, *anything that would be helpful to you*. That's comprehensive. Sadly, many itinerant preachers in our day have about ten sermons, and they preach them, and move to new territory. Paul said he didn't leave until the job was done. He didn't omit a single topic or theme or text from his teaching. He made sure his hearers got the full menu, the entire, well-balanced diet, everything that would be *helpful* [ESV 'profitable'] to them.

John Stott called Paul's work an example of "evangelism in depth," noting that "he shared all possible truth with all possible people in all possible ways."³ He taught a complete message. Paul himself elaborated on his approach in 2 Corinthians 4:2, "Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

Know this. At times preaching this way turns people against you. It did for Paul who said this in his letter to the church at Galatia (Gal. 4:16), "Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?"

There's chocolate cake truth, and there's asparagus truth. Nobody chokes on chocolate cake, but sometimes the asparagus doesn't go down so well. I still gave it to you, says Paul, because I determined I would not hold back anything necessary for your good.

Friends, anybody can preach on God's love and mercy and kindness, and we should, for those wonderful truths are in the Bible. And so are God-exalting truths like His sovereignty and predestination, and realities like judgment and eternal hell. I didn't hold back any of it, says Paul, because you needed it.⁴

So there was a breadth to Paul's preaching. But there was also a point to it...

2. *Paul's preaching called for repentance and faith in Jesus (21)*. "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."

Some preachers are like the Chinese jugglers. You've seen them on tv. One stands against a wall and the others throw knives at him. They hit above his head, close by his ear, under his armpit, and between his fingers. They can throw within a hair's breadth of the man and never hit him.⁵

That's the way some sermons are. They're all over the place, and a lot of truths are shared, but the preacher never gets to the point of it all.

Paul did. What was his objective in preaching? What did he want people to do having heard his message? He tells us right here. *Turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus*. That's the goal of preaching, to call people to turn from living their own way and put their trust in the One who is the Lord of their life, Jesus Christ.

3. *Paul's preaching magnified the good news of God's grace (24)*. The apostle bares his soul in verses 22-24, "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."

What task had the Lord given to Paul? A verbal assignment. To open his mouth as a witness so that people would hear and treasure the good news of God's grace.

All you have to do is read Paul's letters and you can't miss it. He talked about grace all the time, and he talked about the gospel all the time, and he did with non-Christians and Christians alike. Non-Christians need the gospel and grace, for we are saved by grace through faith in the One who died and rose again—that's Ephesians 2:8.

³ Taken from Boice, p. 347.

⁴ Elsewhere he wrote in 1 Thessalonians 2:4, "On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts."

⁵ J.R.W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, pp. 135-6.

But Christians need the gospel and grace too, for I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me—that's Galatians 2:20.

God accepts sinners on the basis of His Son's perfect life, death as their substitute, and triumphant resurrection. That's the gospel, and that's grace, and that's the message Paul preached.

By the way, a question for you, my friend. Do you believe this good news? If you want your sins forgiven, here is God's remedy for you. Put your trust in the gospel of God's grace.

4. *Paul's preaching explained the centrality of God's kingdom (25)*. He says in verse 25, "Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again." What did Paul preach? In verse 24 he said it was *the gospel of God's grace*. Here he says he preached *the kingdom*. Those aren't two different messages. The gospel of God's grace is the message of the kingdom.

Beloved, to tell people there is a King is to tell them the good news of God's unmerited favor. To tell them that this King, whom they have offended, has come to earth to save them from their condemnation and transport them from kingdom of darkness so they can serve Him forever in His kingdom, is to tell them the good news of God's grace.

And if you're going to preach that message, you're going to have to go all the way back and start in Genesis show them how this King created heaven and earth, and how He chose a man named Abraham, and then move into Exodus and show them how He chose a nation called Israel to be His instrument to make Himself known to the whole world, and then work your way through the Historical Books and the Prophets to show how He promised to use Israel to send a Messiah to rescue the whole world. You must preach the whole Book to get that message across, and that's what Paul did. To sum it up...

5. *Paul's preaching covered the whole counsel of God (27)*. That's Paul's conclusion in verses 26-27, "Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God."

Why did Paul say he was innocent? Because he didn't neglect his assignment to make known to his hearers *the whole counsel of God*. Not a partial message. Not a cliff notes message. He preached everything God revealed, the whole counsel of God, the whole Book.⁶

Brothers and sisters, this isn't easy, for several reasons. If you're going to preach the whole Book, you need some sort of plan and schedule. And you'll face opposition along the way.

A few years ago I was preaching through the book of Romans on Sunday mornings, and one Sunday evening at a church business meeting the congregation voted on a matter where there was considerable disagreement. That happens from time to time, but what should never happen, yet did happen in that meeting, was that biblical guidelines for Christ-honoring communication were violated.

On Monday morning, with my head still spinning over the tension from the previous night, I pulled out my preaching schedule. I scanned through the text and theme for the next Sunday's sermon (and keep in mind, this schedule was put in place long before that business meeting)? "What to do when Christians differ"—part one, from Romans 14:1-4. The next Sunday? "What to do when Christians differ"—part two, from

⁶ Jesus Himself told His disciples in John 15:15, "I have called you friends, for *everything that I learned* from my Father I have made known to you."

Romans 14:5-12. The next week? “Learning to major on major issues,” from Romans 14:13-18. Then, “Working at unity,” from Romans 14:19-23. Then “Pleasing others in a self-pleasing world,” from Romans 15:1-6. Then, “Learning to accept one another,” from Romans 15:7-13.

I remember sitting back in my chair and laughing out loud. Not because it was funny, but because I thought to myself, “Lord, if I preach these messages the people who are upset will think that I’m trying to shove something down their throat.” So I consulted our deacons. “What should I do? I don’t want to cause hurt to the already hurting body.”

And the deacons responded, “You must preach those messages. Everybody knows you’re just doing what you always do, preaching through the Book.”

And so we did. And God used those sermons in some very obvious ways, both to prune, and to produce subsequent growth.

Friends, I am so thankful to belong to a church that is committed to biblical theology, to preaching the whole Book. I hope you are, too. We’ll talk about the benefits in a moment, but first, let’s touch on one more thing we learn about ministry from Paul. One, ministry takes your whole life. Two, ministry takes the whole Book. And three...

C. Ministry takes the whole team (28-32). That, in essence, is Paul’s point in verses 28-32, when he says, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

Keep in mind he’s talking to the elders, to the shepherds of the church at Ephesus. And he made three things perfectly clear for them.

1. *The shepherds of the church need to do what Paul did (28).* He sought to model the Book. So must they. He preached the whole Book. So must they.

2. *The shepherds of the church need to beware of the danger of defection (29-31).* Don’t miss that. As Paul looked into the eyes of these church leaders that day at Miletus, he said that even some of them would turn from the truth. In verse 29 he warned about wolves attacking from *outside* of the church, but in verse 30 he warns of those from the *inside*, “from your own number.”

Friends, there’s incredible pressure on church leaders to shift, to shift their message, to shift their motives, and in so doing, to shift the church from its Christ-exalting mission.

Keep watch, says Paul to the elders. Don’t let it happen. Keep serving Christ with your whole life and the whole Book.

Sad to say, just like Paul predicted, some did shift. It didn’t take long for false teachers to start spreading their gangrenous ideas in Ephesus. How do I know? Just seven years after Paul gave this speech at Miletus, he sent Timothy back to Ephesus, wrote the letter we call 1 Timothy, and said this to his associate in 1 Timothy 1:3, “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer.”

And in 1 Timothy 1:18-20, “Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these

and so have shipwrecked their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.”

It didn’t get any better either. Just two or three years after sending 1 Timothy Paul penned 2 Timothy and wrote these words in 2 Timothy 1:15, “You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.”

And in 2 Timothy 2:16-17 “Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus.”

The point? A church’s shepherds need, not only to do what Paul did, to teach the whole Book but also, to beware of the danger of defection. It could happen to anyone.

3. *The church needs shepherds who will teach them to depend totally upon God and His Word (32).* That’s why Paul said, “Now I commit you *to God and to the word of his grace.*” Why? Because only God and His Word “can build you up and give you an inheritance.”

So ministry takes the whole life, the whole Book, and the whole team.

II. Biblical Theology: Getting serious as a church about the implications...

Let’s address three questions pertaining to biblical theology.

A. What is it? It involves three things.

1. *It means we study the whole Bible.* Not just the parts we like, but the whole counsel of God. But there’s another element.

2. *It means we study any text or topic with the whole Bible in mind.*

That’s what biblical theology is all about. The Bible is one book and it has a unified message. So when I’m preaching on a verse in Ecclesiastes, such as “Vanity, vanity, all is vanity,” I need to interpret that verse in light of what the rest of the Bible says.

That’s what cults fail to do. Anybody can isolate a verse, or take a verse out of context, and prove any heretical notion. But a church committed to biblical theology won’t do that.

Sunday School teachers, two of your best friends are your cross reference and concordance. When you’re in a text, use those tools to see what the rest of the Bible says about that subject.

3. *It means we study the Bible with the story of redemption in mind.*

The Holy Spirit worked through human authors to give us the sixty-six books of the Bible. When we’re studying a book, our aim is to get the author’s intent. But the whole Book has an intent, too. The whole Book is the story of redemption, and we need to preach the intent of the parts in light of the intent of the whole.

Some say, “You churches that preach expository sermons short-change evangelism. That’s why we preach salvation messages in our pulpits.”

We’ll have a lot more to say about this in week five, for God-centered evangelism is the fifth mark of a healthy church. But for now, three observations. One, why would a church preach only evangelistic messages to Christians? We’re supposed to evangelize *non-Christians*, and non-Christians didn’t come to church services in the first century, not typically. The primary purpose of a sermon in church is to equip Christians so they can go out and evangelize non-Christians.

Two, if we preach only evangelistic sermons in church, how are we going to preach the whole counsel of God?

And three, it’s a false dichotomy to say expository preaching isn’t evangelistic. Good expositional preaching is evangelistic, for when we preach the intent of any Bible text, we’re going to tell the story. For instance, when I preach Ephesians, sure it has lots

to say to Christians about communication and marriage and parenting, etc. But it also says something powerful to non-Christians. The person who wrote this letter used to hate and kill Christians until he met the One who died to rescue him from his rebellion. There's hope for you, my non-Christian friend, no matter who you are or what you've done.

B. What does it take? I'm intrigued by Paul's claim that he preached *the whole counsel of God*. And verse 31 says he did it in three years. What's it take to do that? Acts 19 tells us. Paul's strategy was twofold. First, he taught for three months in the synagogue until that door closed (19:8). Then he spent the next two years using a lecture hall to teach the disciples, and the text specifically says he had *daily* teaching sessions (19:9-10). One manuscript even specifies that he taught daily "from 11 until 4," probably because the lecture hall was closed for regular business during the siesta time.

Do the math. That's 600+ days, times five hours a day, which equals 3,000 hours of Bible instruction. You can cover a lot of Bible territory in 3,000 hours!

Just think of the implications. Paul gave up his siesta time, and so did his hearers, to study God's Word. He took time that he could have used to make money, and so did they, to study the Bible. That's time away from home improvement, recreation, personal time, all legitimate things, but things that needed to be set aside to make time to study God's Word.

Friends, if you want to learn the Book, it's going to take some sacrifice. You're going to have to *not* do some other things to make time to learn God's Word. But I guarantee you, it's worth it!

What would happen in your life and family and church if we studied the Bible for two years every day for five hours? You say, "That's not feasible." It is for some. The week after Sherry and I returned from our honeymoon, we moved to Grand Rapids where I began to study the Bible every day for the next four years. That may be what the Lord wants some of you to do. But for the majority, He has another plan for you, to stay right here and study the Book in this church.

We have at least four opportunities for you to study God's Word every week at WBC. Sunday School, a Sunday morning sermon, a Sunday evening sermon or lesson, and a Bible study on Wednesday. Do you know what happens when people carve out time to participate in those learning opportunities? They get to know the Book, and if they come with the right heart, the God of the Book.

Is there more to the Christian life than learning the Book? For sure. But there's no substitute for it. I have never met a strong Christian who did not make time for the Book.

So here's what it takes. I'll mention three things.

1. *It requires that we minister with the mindset of a marathoner.*
2. *It requires that those who teach be prepared.*
3. *It requires that those who hear be here.*

There are 1189 chapters in the Bible in 66 books, with 929 in the OT and 260 in the NT. Depending on your English translation, there are around 31,100 verses in the Bible, with approximately 800,000 words. If we're going to preach the whole Book, it's going to take time and persistence.

I did some reflection this week on the question, what portion of the Bible have we worked through as a church in the past 24 years? The answer? Since 1987, by God's grace, we've done two complete surveys of the entire Bible in our Wednesday evening Bible study. At the rate of about one book per week, we worked our way from Genesis to Revelation on two different occasions.

In terms of more thorough verse by verse book studies, we've preached through about three-fourths of the NT and one-third of the OT on Sundays and Wednesdays. Here's the breakdown...

In the Old Testament: We've worked through Genesis 1-11, 37-50, the entire books of Joshua, Ruth, 1 Samuel, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Lamentations, Daniel, Obadiah, Jonah, Habakkuk, Haggai, and Malachi. We've worked through key passages in Exodus, Deuteronomy, portions of the Psalms (about one-third) and Proverbs (select topics), and portions of Isaiah and Jeremiah.

In the New Testament: We've done complete book studies of Mark, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, 1 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. We've also worked through about half of Matthew, one-third of Luke, and over half of John.

Much of this teaching is still available for your edification online at wheelersburgbaptist.com. You can read the transcripts of sermons, or you can listen to the audio recordings for the past five years.

C. What are the benefits? Here are five.

1. *It gives us a balanced and complete diet.* If a church preaches the whole Book, then in time the church will hear what God has to say about every subject He wants His people to know.

2. *It takes us deeper into the knowledge of God.* If you want to know God well, then you must know His self-revelation well. This Book will take you into the depths of the riches of the wisdom of God.

3. *It results in a maturing congregation.* I say "maturing" because we never arrive. But churches that study the Book with a commitment to apply it grow, not only in numbers, but in depth and strength. They grow *up* as well as *out*.

4. *It creates an openness to talk about difficult subjects.* Friends, we're not afraid of words like predestination and election at WBC. Why not? Because they're in the Book and we've settled the matter that if God says it, then it's good. So there's an openness in this church to talk about issues God addresses. Like prejudice, and divorce, and worship styles, and the insufficiency of psychology, and on and on. We can talk about those matters because it's not our opinions that matter. We want to know what God has said about those and every other issue.

5. *It equips us to be ambassadors for Christ in a changing world.* If all I do is tell you what to think, I haven't equipped you for life in the real world. But if I can teach you *how* to think by going to the Bible, then I've prepared you to fulfill your mission of making Christ known in this changing world.

And so, there's only one response that's appropriate...

Response: Thank God for the Book, all of it!