

If you recall last week I began a topical series entitled, Back to Basics, wherein I hope to consider the various activities associated with the Christian life—last week we considered the subject of How to Hear Sermons—this morning we come to the subject, How to Read Scripture—but before we come to this subject it may be helpful to clarify that normally Scripture reading takes place in conjunction with meditation and prayer—a suggested order would be—a short prayer, Scripture reading, meditation, and a longer prayer—thus there is a sense in which these three go together—but it's my intent this morning to focus upon reading, leaving meditation and prayer to subsequent weeks...

As was true of hearing sermons, I fear few Christians have given the subject of how to read Scripture little if any thought—we all read our Bibles [or at least I trust we do], but are we reading it in such a way so as to benefit us—when we read our Bibles are we having dealings with its author—are we letting the words of Scripture sink down into our ears...

CHS—“...much apparent Bible reading is not Bible reading at all. The verses pass under the eye, and the sentences glide over the mind, but there is no true reading. An old preacher used to say, the Word has mighty free course among many nowadays, for it goes in at one of their ears and out at the other; so it seems to be with some readers—they can read a very great deal, because they do not read anything. The eye glances but the mind never rests. The soul does not light upon the truth and stay there. It flutters over the landscape as a bird might do, but it builds no nest therein, and finds no rest for the sole of its foot. Such reading is not reading...”

- I. How are we to read Scripture—or, five helps in reading Scripture
 - II. Why are we to read Scripture—or, three motives to read Scripture
- I. How are we to read Scripture—or, five helps in reading Scripture
 - A. Read prayerfully
 1. By this I mean we must begin by asking God to bless His word to our hearts—that His word would be effectually applied within us...
 2. It has been my practice for years to offer a short prayer before I read Scripture asking God that He would enable me to hear His voice within His word...
 3. My friends, we must come to Scripture with a deep sense of our dependency of His Spirit to enable us to rightly understand and really feel the truth of Scripture...
 4. This is, in my estimation, the largest problem that hinders many of us from benefiting from our reading of God's holy book...
 5. We come to the Scriptures forgetful of our desperate need for the illumination of God's Spirit to open our eyes to the truth...
 6. We open the Bible and we read it with little or no consciousness of this need, thus we read the Bible to little or no benefit...
 7. But oh my beloved brethren, if you or I am to read the Scriptures properly we must read them dependant upon the Spirit of God...
 8. To be specific [1] we must pray for illuminating grace, Ps.119:18—“open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from your law...”
 9. Have you ever read a portion of Scripture that you've read several times before only to have it opened up in a unique and fresh way...
 10. Perhaps a phrase or statement appears as if out of nothing—to the point that you ask yourself—Has that phrase always been there...
 11. Oh my friends, a great danger exists in that we can become so familiar with Scripture that reading it can become mechanical...
 12. Oh how we need the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, to open up our eyes that we might see wondrous things therein...

13. Thomas Watson—“When we read the holy Scriptures let us look up to God for a blessing. Let us beg the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, that we may see the ‘deep things of God.’ Pray God that the same Spirit that wrote the Scripture would enable us to understand it...”
14. But [2] we must pray for empowering grace, Ps.119:34—“Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; Indeed, I shall observe it with *my* whole heart...”
15. By this I mean without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we will be left impotent to implement or be affected by what we read...
16. Have you ever come from reading the word of God, just as cold and dull as you were when you approached it...
17. Thus we must begin our reading with prayer and remain in a playful spirit throughout the time spent within the word...
18. William a Brakel—“...we must lift up our heart to the Lord, beseeching Him who is the Author of this Word for His Spirit, that He may cause us to perceive the truth expressed in God’s Word and apply it to the heart...”

B. Read expectantly

1. By this I mean we must approach Scripture with a sense of joyful expectancy at having our souls exposed to the word of God...
2. Brakel—“...men ought to rejoice wholeheartedly in this most precious gift of God, embrace it with much love, and be joyful whenever they may either behold it or hold it in their very hands...”
3. Thomas Watson—“The word...is a spiritual garden, and the promises are the fragrant flowers or spices in this garden. How should we delight to walk among these beds of spices...”
4. Ps.19:9-11—“the fear of the LORD *is* clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD *are* true *and* righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired *are they* than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. 11 Moreover by them Your servant is warned, *And* in keeping them *there is* great reward...”
5. How would you or I enter a gold mine, if we were given freedom to gather up as many nuggets as we can carry...

C. Read consistently

1. Here I refer to the need to be consistent in reading the Scriptures and ideally I suggest that we read our Bibles daily...
2. Far better to read a smaller amount of Scripture daily, then to read larger portions of Scripture once or twice a week...
3. Ps.1:1-2—“blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night...”
4. We find similar words in Prov.8:34—“blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors...”
5. Here wisdom is likened to a city, at whose gates the blessed man gathers daily, watching and waiting at its gates...
6. But then someone might here object—I simply don’t have the time to read my Bible every day—to which I can respond very simply—this is not true...
7. While it is true that not every Christian has the same amount of time, every Christian without exception can find at least 15 minutes a day...
8. Donald Whitney—“In no more than fifteen minutes a day you can read through the Bible in less than a year’s time. Only five minutes a day takes you through the Bible in less than three years. And yet the majority of Christians never read the Bible all the way through in their whole life....”
9. If I were to ask you how much time do you spend a day watching television, exercising, reading newspapers, and playing on the computer, some of us would be embarrassed to say...

10. And yet, we are not able to find 15 minutes every day to open our Bibles and hear from the very mouth of God...
11. It's my personal opinion that the issue isn't a lack of time but of motivation and desire—it just isn't a priority in our lives...
12. I fear what happens is our priorities get confused, and we begin to rationalize our behavior—my life is just too busy, my schedule is just too hectic...
13. And yet, if we were honest with ourselves, we would have to confess, we seem to find time within our busy lives and hectic schedules to do those things we like doing...
14. Thomas Boston—"People will not be at the pains to seek into what they do not value. If men did not prize gold, they would not rip up the bowels of the earth for it. It is the undervaluing of the scriptures that makes people so little to study and seek into them..."
15. But then having said this, it remains a sad reality that even true Christians can at times struggle with consistency in their daily reading of Scripture...
16. Thus let me suggest a few helps—[1] read at the same time and place—this will help you to instill a sense of regularity within your day...
17. That person who says—I will read my Bible whenever I get the chance—probably will never get the chance...
18. But instead we must establish a consistent, daily, schedule—every day at this time, in this place I will read my Bible...
19. Let me put it this way—if I were to ask you when do you regularly read your Bible, how would you respond...
20. Would you say, every day, either in the morning, afternoon, or evening, I take my Bible and a cup of coffee or tea and I read...
21. Or, would you say, I read my Bible whenever I get a chance, at which you would have to confess, oftentimes you fail to get a chance...
22. Mankind is by nature a creature of habit, thus the necessity to incorporate Bible reading as a regular part of our daily routine...
23. Thus unless we make Bible reading a part of our daily routine, we are less likely to be consistent and more prone to be sporadic...
24. Notice [2] use a reading plan or system—for example, on Monday we read Matthew chapter 1, and on Tuesday we read chapter 2, and right straight through to the end...
25. Most Bible books, with the possible exception of Psalms and Proverbs, were designed to be read in a consecutive manner...
26. Thus we must read through a book of the Bible, starting at the beginning and reading consecutively unto the end...
27. For example, in reading the gospel of John, we would start with chapter one, and read straight through unto chapter 21...
28. What I have done for years is read a chapter from the OT and a chapter from the NT—for example, today I read chapter 1 of Numbers and chapter 1 from Matthew...
29. Tomorrow I read chapter 2 of Numbers and chapter 2 from Matthew—and I continue in this pattern until the book is finished and then I start the next book...
30. Notice [3] enlist an accountability partner—for example, it may be that a husband and wife read the same chapter separate from one another...
31. And then over supper, or perhaps later in the evening, they compare notes on the chapter and discuss some of its application to the home...

D. Read understandingly

1. By this I mean while the primary purpose of reading Scripture is to become familiar with its whole, we must have at least a general understanding of what we have read...
2. I dare say, I have known many Christians who have read through their Bibles a dozen times but possess little understanding of its basic content...

3. Thomas Watson—“Without knowledge the Scripture is a sealed book; every line is too high for us; and if the Word shoot above our head, it can never hit our heart...”
4. To this end I suggest that you obtain a conservative and concise commentary—one that summarizes each chapter in a short paragraph...
5. For example, you can download a free Bible program from the internet entitled E-Sword, which has 12 very good commentators, including Matthew Henry, Albert Barnes, and John Gill...
6. But to be more specific—[1] we must understand its historical context—here I specifically refer to the OT historical and prophetic books...
7. We must be able to discern with some clarity where the book fits in the unfolding of God’s redemptive purposes...
8. For example, we should know that the book of Leviticus contains legislation given at the foot of Mount Sinai...
9. We should know that the book of Deuteronomy is a series of sermons given by Moses on the plains of Moab in preparation of entering the Promised Land...
10. We need to know which of the prophets were pre and post exilic—we should know that 1 and 2 Chronicles covers the same history as does the books of Samuel and Kings...
11. I assure you, we can read a 10 chapters every day but if we are clueless as to who is speaking and to who he is speaking it won’t benefit us a bit...
12. Now I am not suggesting that you have to have all of these things memorized, but what I am suggesting is that before you start a new book you take a few minutes and review its historical context...
13. For example, you come upon the book of Isaiah in your OT reading, before you read the first chapter you review a good commentator or Bible survey...
14. And thus you recall that Isaiah was sent to the 10 Northern tribes to warn them of coming exile and to foretell a future restoration...
15. Notice [2] we must understand its immediate meaning—is the section I’m reading historical narrative, prophetic terminology, or didactical language...
16. This may mean we have to reread the chapter—the other day, my wife and I had to reread a chapter out of Ezekiel several times in order to understand what we read...
17. Notice [3] we must understand its personal application—what does this passage say to me in my present situation...
18. Thomas Boston—“Some read the scriptures to furnish their heads with notions of the things of religion, and their tongues with talk about them; but read ye for holiness to your hearts, and to rule your walk thereby...”
19. Thus the Scriptures must be read with an eye to apply them to our life—we must read mindful of our present circumstances...
20. Ps.119:104—“through your precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way...”—that is, they have a practical effect upon my heart and life...
21. CHS—“There must be knowledge of God before there can be love to God: there must be a knowledge of divine things, as they are revealed, before there can be an enjoyment of them. We must try to make out, as far as our finite mind can grasp it, what God means by this and what he means by that; otherwise we may kiss the book and have no love to its contents, we may reverence the letter and yet really have no devotion towards the Lord who speaks to us in these words. Beloved, you will never get comfort to your soul out of what you do not understand, nor find guidance for your life out of what you do not comprehend; nor can any practical bearing upon your character come out of that which is not understood by you...”

E. Read Christocentrically

1. By this I mean we are to read Scripture as it is intended to be read, namely, with an eye to the single theme of redemption through Christ...
2. We must come to the Scriptures with the desire of the bride in Song 3:1—“Have you seen the one I love...”
3. By this I am not suggesting that we ignore the historical context or application of Scripture nor that we allegorize or misuse Scripture...

4. But what I am saying is this—that salvation of God’s elect through the person and work of Christ is the foremost purpose of Scripture from first to last...
5. Lk.24:44—“everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms...”
6. Regardless if we are reading the book of Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Psalms, Hosea, Luke, 1Peter, or the Revelation, the primary purpose of these books is the glory of God in the salvation of His people through Christ...
7. Thus we are not only warranted to read our Bibles with an eye to Christ but are expressly told to do so by our Savior Himself...
8. But to be more specific, notice [1] we must find Christ typified or foreshadowed throughout the books of Moses...
9. Jn.5:46—“if you believed Moses, you would believe Me for he wrote about Me...”—that is, ultimately speaking, the entire Pentateuch points towards Christ...
10. From Genesis to Deuteronomy, we find Christ shadowed in persons [Isaac, Moses, and Aaron], things [Noah’s ark, the tabernacle, the furniture, sacrifices, and cities of refuge], and events [the Passover, the year of Jubilee, etc.]...
11. Notice [2] we must find Christ promised or prophesied throughout the prophets—both the major [Isaiah-Daniel] and minor prophets [Hosea-Malachi]...
12. But we mustn’t over look the book of Psalms as Peter said of David in Acts 3:30—“...being a prophet...spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ...”
13. Thus throughout the Psalms we find Christ both typified and prophesied with reference to His incarnation, suffering, resurrection, and glorification...
14. Notice [3] we find Christ historically present within the four gospels—here we find much of what the prophets foretold—the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ...
15. Notice [4] we find Christ as Head of His church within the epistles—throughout these books we find how we are to live in and for Christ...
16. Thus the majority of the NT letters begin as does the book of Romans—“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle...”
17. That is—he clarifies at the outset that he writes the letter as a divinely sanctioned ambassador for Jesus Christ...
18. Notice [5] we find Christ as a King who presently reigns and is to soon return in the book of the Revelation...
19. Let me suggest that you read the book of the Revelation with this perspective—that it is written to persecuted Christians, encouraging them to look away from themselves unto the victorious and all-glorious King...
20. Thus the book begins, Rev.1:1—“the revelation of Jesus Christ...”—that is, it is from Him and it is about Him...

II. Why are we to read Scripture—or, three motives to read Scripture

A. Because of the benefits of reading Scripture

1. Let me simply suggest a few of the many benefits there is in reading Scripture—[1] it gives us a broad familiarity of the whole of Scripture...
2. As I eluted to earlier the primary purpose behind Bible reading is to get a broad overview of the totality of God’s revelation...
3. For example, when I was first converted and was taught of God concerning the doctrine of electing grace I quickly found those texts that supported these truths...
4. But as I began to mature as a Christian and read through my Bibles I would come across these texts in there contexts...
5. And what happened was I began to gain a deeper understanding of these individual texts and the books from which they were taken...

6. We could liken Bible reading to flying over a forest seeing its whole, while memorizing, meditating, and studying Scripture is like examining individual trees within that whole...
7. Notice [2] it gives us a balanced understanding of Scripture—that is, consistent exposure to the whole of Scripture will keep us from a lopsided theology...
8. Have you ever known a person who seems to bring every conversation back to the same subject—we sometimes refer to them as Johnny-one-notes...
9. R.A. Torrey—“The whole Bible is the Word of God, therefore the whole Bible should be studied. Men become insufferable cranks by confining their Bible study to single books or to narrow circles of topics...”
10. Notice [3] it gives us insight into the organic unity of Scripture—by this I mean it enables us to understand how the old testament relates to the new...
11. We must never forget that the Bible while comprised of 66 books written by 40 different people over 1400 years, is in fact a single book with a single purpose—the glorification of God in the salvation of man...
12. Geoffrey Thomas—“The Bible is a body of truth, which is organically inter-related and interdependent. You cannot isolate a part of the human body and understand its function without reference to the whole. So the Old Testament cannot be understood without the New Testament, and Paul’s letters much be accompanied by knowledge of the Gospels...”

B. Because of our desperate need for Scripture

1. I believe that we each prosper from Scripture reading if we approached it with a deeper sense of our desperate need for it...
2. Scripture itself uses a diversity of imageries to describe this need, let me merely suggest three, notice [1] the Scriptures are meat and drink for our souls...
3. Thus our Savior said in quoting Deut.8:3—“it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God...” (Matt.4:4)
4. To put it plainly—there is no healthy Christianity outside of a regular and consistent diet of the word of God...
5. 1Pet.2:2—“as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious...”
6. It is at this point that I fear many of us go astray—we are not growing as Christians because there is no consistent intake of the word of God...
7. Our souls are anemic and weak, we have little delight in the things of God and all because we are failing to nourish our souls with the bread and milk of Holy Scripture...
8. Notice [2] the Scriptures are a weapon against our enemies—“take up...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...”
9. Notice [3] the Scriptures are a light and a lamp to our feet, Ps.119:130—“the entrance of Your words gives light...”
10. Let me give you a personal testimony—when I am not prayerfully and consistently reading my Bible, I feel spiritual weak, my enemies get the upper hand, and I begin to lose my way...

C. Because of the sublime content of Scripture

1. My friends I have done my best in providing various helps to assist you in reading your Bibles and have pressed upon your consciences various motives...
2. But when it comes right down to it, what you and I need in order to read our Bibles I can not give, and that is an inward love and desire for the word of God...
3. This I am afraid is the root cause why many professing Christians rarely if ever read their Bibles—there is no inward desire...
4. The Lord said to Ephraim in Hos.8:12—“I have written for him the great things of My law, but they were considered a strange thing...”
5. Oh my friends this world has never nor will it ever know a book such as the Bible—it is a treasure that needs to be cherished. Amen.