

Deacon/Elder Lecture Outlines

Lecture 7

Grow Spiritually Through Personal Bible Study

I. Introduction

- A. "The Word of God Is the Foundation of Knowledge." Those stirring words are engraved into Ambassador Hall on the Ambassador College campus in Pasadena. Those words and the truth they express have guided God's Work since its foundation in this era.
- B. But the sentiment these words express -- that God's Word is the foundation of knowledge -- should also be engraved -- not merely upon the building on the Ambassador campus -- but upon our own consciousness.
- C. That is, the Word of God should be the very foundation of our service in God's Church.

II. SPS

This lecture will explain how you may grow spiritually through personal Bible study, to the end that your service in God's Work may have a true and firm foundation.

III. Need

A. God's Word Is Spiritual Food That We Need to Survive Spiritually

Our physical bodies are constantly running down. Minute by minute they are literally dying, but at the same time, they are being revitalized and renewed by physical food that nourishes and sustains us. What would happen if we were to stop taking food into our bodies? We would begin a process that, if not interrupted, would result in the end of our physical life.

In the same way, our spiritual life is sustained by spiritual food. God describes His Word as that life-giving spiritual food. It is the staff of our spiritual life (Matthew 4:4).

John 6:63 -- Christ's words are spirit and life. He was, in the flesh, the Word of God personified (John

1:14). He described Himself as the living bread that -- if we eat of it -- will enable us to live forever (John 6:51).

Romans 8:5-6 -- To be spiritually minded is life and peace. We can be spiritually minded only if we are regularly putting into our minds spiritual thoughts -- God's thoughts.

Romans 12:2 -- Our minds must continually be renewed. A spiritual mind is not permanent in a physical body. Every day our minds must be renewed by the study of God's Word.

God spoke personally to Adam, to Enoch and Noah, to Abraham, Moses and all His prophets in Old Testament times, but today God speaks to His servants through His Word. If we are not letting God speak to us regularly and consistently through diligent, wholehearted and often prayerful Bible study, then we are not learning to think like God thinks, and we will starve to death spiritually.

B. God's Word Is the Basic Tool We Use to Guide Our Service to God's People

II Timothy 3:16 -- "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." This verse summarizes the purposes of God's Word. It is profitable for:

1. "Doctrine"

A doctrine is merely a teaching. We refer to the doctrines of God's Church as "the truth." These doctrines explain God's plan for mankind, how He is working it out and our part in it. Our understanding of the truth of God will depend directly on our personal Bible study. So will our ability to teach God's Word in sermonettes, sermons and Bible studies.

2. "Reproof"

This word could better be translated conviction. God's Word convicts us.

James 1:23-25 -- It reveals to us our shortcomings and sins, and convicts us of them.

Romans 7:7 -- Just as Paul came to understand what lust is, we all learn what sin is through the Word of God.

Hebrews 4:12 -- God's Word is a two-edged sword that cuts both ways. It plainly shows us our thoughts and real intentions. God's Word brings us to deeper and deeper repentance. Job was finally convicted of what he was when God spoke to him personally. Unless God is speaking to you through regular personal Bible study, you won't see yourself, and you won't qualify to be used by Him.

3. "Correction"

This is the only verse (II Timothy 3:16) in the New Testament where this Greek word is used. It means, literally, "a straightening up again." God's Word sets us straight.

Let God's Word correct you, change you and set you straight! All of us, to one degree or another, are affected by our past sins. What we have done in the past -- our habits and our ways of life -- and what we have thought affects our minds and our character today.

Psalm 119:9 -- Looking into and heeding God's Word will wash us spiritually.

Ephesians 5:26 -- Regular, intensive Bible study washes our minds. It cleans out the spiritual error that accumulated in our minds before conversion.

John 15:2-3 -- God will purge -- He will correct and work on -- those who are growing and bearing fruit.

Hebrews 12:5-11 -- God corrects us out of love -- out of a real concern for us. Correction sometimes hurts for the moment, but it helps us put on the mind and character of God.

God has, in His Word, corrected us in principle for every fault that a human can have -- and it all applies to us. For example, we haven't literally fallen down before an idol, perhaps, but we have made, and often do make, idols of some things. Accept and profit from correction. Don't justify yourself in the face of it -- even in your mind. The correction may not apply exactly as given, but the principle always applies. Don't resent it -- take it and change.

4. "Instruction in Righteousness"

Psalm 119:172 -- God's commandments are righteousness, and God's Word lists, expounds and magnifies the commandments so that we will understand how to obey them in the spirit of the law.

Just as any machine comes with an instruction book to show how it is to be operated, God has given man an instruction book to show us how we are to operate. That instruction book is His Word. Following those instructions will give us happiness, peace and joy in this physical life, as well as ensure that we will experience these things for all eternity in His Kingdom.

C. Why We Should Study God's Word

Deuteronomy 17:15, 18-20 -- Notice that God commanded the king of Israel to write out the law and to read it every day of his life (verse 19). In this way he would learn to fear God and keep God's commandments and statutes.

Verse 20 -- It would give him a right perspective of himself and keep him humble. It would direct him in God's way and give him a long, happy life. How much more should we, who will be kings in the world tomorrow, study God's Word every day as a way of life?

Hebrews 5:12-13 -- Some of our older, longtime members just do not have the deep understanding of God's Word that they should have. Do some of us, who should be teachers, need to be taught the beginning principles of God's Word and need to be fed milk rather than strong meat? As a leader in the local Church, you must go above and beyond the average Church member in your knowledge and understanding of God's Word -- and in your ability to apply it to your everyday life.

II Timothy 4:1-3 -- We who are teachers are commanded to use "the Word" (the Bible) to preach, teach and guide. Notice that we are not to rely upon, as a foundation, the methods of this world, such as its psychology or business methods, but the Bible. Obviously, to use the Bible, we must know the Bible.

IV. How to Study Your Bible

A. Have a Definite Time for Bible Study

In resolving to get more out of your personal Bible study, plan to study at the same time each day, if possible.

As humans, we tend to develop patterns of habit. Too many of us develop bad habits that work against our efforts to change and grow spiritually. But the force of habit can be a powerful ally to help us if we will use it. Studying at a set time each day will help us develop a habit of regular Bible study.

B. Provide a Regular Place and Proper Environment

Have a definite area or place in which to study. You will tend to associate that particular area or place in your home with Bible study, and this will help you get in the mood more quickly each time you begin to study. This place should, of course, be one that is private, quiet and conducive to a proper mental attitude. It is difficult to concentrate and drink in deeply of God's Word with the distractions of noise or interruptions.

C. Have a Proper Attitude in Study

1. Study With Purpose

If you are merely going through the motions of Bible study in order to log time, your Bible study will be superficial and will be of little value. You won't grow spiritually as you should. Study with the intention of coming to a deeper and fuller understanding of how God wants us to live.

James 1:5 -- Realize that God is the source of all wisdom and understanding. Our attitude in our personal Bible study should be that of a child coming to his father for instruction. Ask and expect God to help you to deeply understand His Word so that you can grow spiritually and develop godly character.

2. Fully Respect God's Word

Familiarity breeds contempt, and if we aren't careful, we will begin to take God's Word for granted. Approach your personal Bible study with a deep respect for God's Word, realizing that what you are studying truly is inspired by God, and that the words truly are words of life that should have a real impact on your personal life.

Fear to treat God's Word lightly by studying lackadaisically or with a ho-hum attitude. When you study, concentrate and devote your undivided attention to what you are studying.

3. Be Positive and Big-Minded As You Study

Be positive and big-minded in your approach to study, keeping in mind God's overall purpose for mankind. Don't zero in on some vague scripture or obscure prophecy and lose sight of the big picture.

D. Read the Entire Bible

God deliberately inspired the Bible to be written "here a little, and there a little" (Isaiah 28:10), and some passages of Scripture are indeed "hard to be understood" (II Peter 3:16). Don't get sidetracked by sections that may not be completely clear to you at this time. God will, in His own time, reveal the meaning of such scriptures. He is continually opening up new understanding to His Church.

You will profit most in your own personal Bible study by seeking to deeply comprehend and make a part of your very character the basics of Christian living -- love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self-control.

II Timothy 2:14, 23, 3:9 -- Recognize the type of study that is unprofitable and vain. Don't delve into a search for "new truth" or strive over words, phrases or passages that are not crystal clear to you.

E. Live By Every Word of God

It is important to study the Bible regularly and consistently, and it is important to study with a proper attitude, but the most important point to remember is that we are to live by every word of God. Don't set as your primary goal in Bible study merely the accumulation of more knowledge. We are being judged by our works -- by our actions and attitudes -- not merely by what we know.

In some ways, this is the most important point about Bible study. Psalm 111:10 says, "A good understanding have all they that do His commandments."

Understanding, then, comes from obedience -- from applying God's Word to our life.

F. Apply What You Learn

As you study, think in specific, concrete terms about how the concepts and principles you are reviewing apply to everyday life situations. This will make your personal Bible study interesting and meaningful.

You will then remember what you have studied and be able to put it to practice when the situation or circumstance comes up.

If you study the account of Abraham's life, for example, merely to learn about him as a historical person, you miss the point. You also miss much of the point if you learn from that account only that "we should have faith." Unless you can apply the examples in Abraham's life to specific circumstances in your life, you probably have not really strengthened your faith by a study of his life.

In certain parts of the Bible we are given specific instruction, such as in the "Sermon on the Mount," which we must apply to specific circumstances in our lives. In other cases, we learn by the example given, such as from Abraham's faith and attitude of unquestioning obedience or David's loyalty to Saul. Learn to apply what you are studying to your everyday life and live by every word of God.

G. Study to Help Others

Extremely important here is for you to study with an eye toward (helping) God's people. If you study merely for your own growth, you are being selfish and limiting your growth as a result. When you study, think of the needs of the Church or the problems of those you serve, and search for ways to help others as your responsibilities dictate or allow.

V. Conclusion

Any great effort, be it a building at Ambassador College or a spiritual work of service to the local church, is only as good as its foundation. In the case of our work of service, let us strive so "The Word of God is the Foundation" of our ministry and service.

