

Why Read This Old Book?

Introduction

- A. At the start of a new year, it seems many Christians begin talking about Bible reading and Bible reading plans. All the blogs I keep up with from men and women I appreciate, at least, seem to explode momentarily with commentary on the subject.
 - 1. And I suppose this makes sense. The transition from an old year to a new one seems an obvious place to pause and reflect. It seems a good time to consider how the last year went and how you hope this new one will go. It's an appropriate time to take stock of your roles and goals and how that translates into your schedule and daily liturgies.
- B. And in these moments of reflection, for the Christian, there is perhaps no subject more worthy of our consideration than how we have been faring with reading God's word. Have we been reading it at all? What needs to change as we approach a new year? What goals should we set? What plans should we make? What habits should we try to develop?
- C. But it is not lost on me that often, even for Christians, if we're honest, we struggle with a deeper question: Why even read this old book at all? Isn't there a better use of our time than this? O sure, many of us know we should be reading our Bibles. But do we know why?
 - 1. That is what I should like to consider with you this morning. I have 7 reasons I'd like to offer in response. And I do hope in some way through this that, at the beginning of the year here, you will find fresh inspiration to pursue it.
 - a. And, at the close, if there is still time, I'll give us just a few practical tips for how to go about it. Why? And How? There is our agenda for this morning.

Why?

(1) Because It Is God's Word to Us

- A. When it comes to why we should read this old book, the first reason I feel we must put forward is simply this: Because this old book is God's word.
 - 1. Obviously, I do not have time this morning to make a full case for the Bible as God's word from an apologetical standpoint. But as Christians, as those who already claim to believe such a thing, it is nonetheless important that we stand back and at least briefly reconsider this truth and its astounding implications for our Bible reading.
- B. I suppose I should first at least put a text forward in support of this idea that the Bible does, in fact, claim to be God's word.

1. On this, of course, there is perhaps no greater place to go than that now famous discussion in 2 Tim 2. Paul, writing to the young Timothy, says this in vv. 14-17: “¹⁴ [A]s for you [Timothy], continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”
 - a. The point of focus for us in the present moment, of course, is this idea that “all Scripture is breathed out by God . . .” (v. 16a). The Bible is not a compilation of man’s opinions or intuitions concerning the divine. It is not a mix here or there of God’s word and man’s. It is all from the mouth of our Maker, though it comes through the pen of man. The Bible is God’s word.
- C. When once we realize this, we must step back and be struck with the question: What in the world is God doing talking to us?
 1. O sure, we like to imagine ourselves relatively important perhaps. We may want to just assume that we are worthy of such dialogue with almighty God. But our pride in this makes it all the more amazing that God should sustain His conversation with us at all.
 - a. It is a preposterous idea that God should entertain a conversation with the likes of us. How could the King of kings stoop to speak with me? We must not lose the wonder of it.
- D. Surely you’ve been tricked into seeing this very thing while reading the gospels—as you’ve watched Jesus spending time with the twelve disciples—or we might call them, at the risk of being irreverent, the twelve imbeciles.
 1. We see them rebuking Jesus at the mention of his death, and arguing amongst themselves as to who is the greatest, and attempting to bribe Him for seats at his right and left hand, and falling asleep when He tells them to stay alert in prayer, and betraying Him for a few pieces of silver, and running in fear when He is taken in by the Sanhedrin, and denying they ever knew Him to save their own skin, and still doubting Him even after he appears to them in resurrection glory.
 - a. We see all of these things and we go pale to face and think: “Whatever is the Son of God doing with losers like these twelve? If I were Him I would have broken company with these guys long ago. They are not worthy of such a privileged place. Why should He be walking and talking and carrying on with them?”
 - i. But somewhere along the way, as we are thinking such things, the Spirit comes in with that firm yet tender voice that only He has, and says to us like Nathan the prophet once said to David: “You are the man!” (2 Sam 12:7). And we are undone. Why should Jesus associate with us? Why should God speak to us? Who are we?! Not only are we creature and He is Creator, but

we are sinful and He is holy. It is an astounding thing, to be invited into dialogue with the Lord of glory, the God of the universe.

- E. Now, I recognize that our current president is quite a controversial figure to say the least. Some may love him and others despise him. But nevertheless, if you receive a call from him, if you get message that he has something he wishes to speak with you about, no doubt you are intrigued, even honored, and surely you will attend to his words at that point.

- 1. How much more so this Bible? How much more so these words that God has “breathed out” for our profit?

- F. So the first reason we should read from this old book is because it is a profound privilege to do so. It is God’s word to us! What fools would we have to be to let such a thing collect dust on our shelves?

(2) Because It Is the Way We Commune with Him

- A. Related to this first reason now comes the second: Because It Is the Way We Commune with Him. It needs to be clarified that the Bible is not some collection of dead words we’ve managed to preserve from the distant past. We don’t read our Bibles like historians read ancient documents—as some sort of an intellectual exercise, probing into times of old in attempts to gain knowledge of the people and places that once were. We don’t just read the Bible to get some sense of what God’s done and what He must be like.

- 1. We read the Bible to meet with Him. As we read, by the Spirit, Jesus Himself comes to commune with us. Bible reading is not merely some intellectual excavation into the past, it is an interpersonal exchange with the living God in the present moment. “[T]he word of God is living and active” (Heb 4:12), because He is living and active in and through it.

- B. One of my favorite texts that deals with this point is found in 2 Cor 3-4. I, obviously, don’t have time for a detailed exegesis of these chapters but let me at least bring out few things. In 3:18 Paul propels us towards one of the most stunning realities in all the Bible. Speaking of new covenant believers he writes: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”

- 1. The background for his thought here is the OT account of Moses where Moses would meet with God face to face in the tabernacle, and he beheld God’s glory in some sense, so much so that his own face would even shine for a little while afterwards as a result.

- a. And Paul is saying that this sort of thing, only to a much greater degree, is happening now for us, new covenant believers in Christ. We now have been granted access to God, we too are beholding His glory, we too are taking on some of His shine, only it’s not growing dimmer, it’s getting steadily brighter.

- C. But the pressing question here is: How do we behold this glory? Where do we see it? I want to see it. Where do I go?

1. Well, the surprising answer to this question comes when we consider the surrounding context of [v. 18](#). On either side of this verse, do you want to know what Paul is talking about? The word of God.
 - a. Let me give you just one example. In [3:14](#), speaking of the Jews, Paul writes: [“For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted . . .”](#) They read the word and they see nothing of God’s glory because there is a veil.
 - i. But ([v. 18](#)) we are those for whom the veil has been removed by the grace of Christ, so that, when we read, we behold—God stands forth in glory, Jesus comes and communes with us.
- D. Here’s what I want you to get. When you open up this old book to read it’s as if you are walking with Moses towards that tabernacle, separating the folds in the tent and walking in to sit in the very presence of God, to behold His glory, to commune with Him.
- E. So, as we transition into a new year, if God feels distant to you, if you are looking out at your life right now and asking “Where are You?”, let me encourage you: Take up this old book and read!

(3) Because It Supplies the Holy Spirit

- A. For quite some time now there has been this notion going around in Christian circles that you have to choose between being a Bible sort of Christian or a Holy Spirit sort of Christian. You can either be one of those crusty, academic, by the book sorts, or you can follow the Holy Spirit into new life and exhilarating adventure.
 1. You must make a choice, they say, between two trinities. Will it be the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Or the Father, Son, and Holy Bible? The one will be warm and vibrant. The other cold and stale. “Stop worrying so much about your Bible reading, your doctrine, parsing out the language, and so forth. You have the Spirit. Pray, talk to Him, follow as He leads and you’ll be just fine.”
 - a. I’ll never forget what an older believer who was trying to mentor me in the Lord once encouraged me to do. It was something like: “Go into the woods, but, Nick, don’t bring your Bible. You know your Bible. Get to know the Spirit.” Now he meant well, I am sure, but even then I could sense something off with this idea.
- B. This whole idea of either Bible or Spirit really is most certainly a false dichotomy. The Scriptures know nothing of it. Indeed Jesus Himself seems to indicate the close connection between the two when He virtually conflates them into one in [John 6:63](#): [“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”](#)
- C. One of my favorite texts is found in Galatians, I read it often to you. Listen to it again once more: [“¹ O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. ² Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? ⁴ Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? ⁵ Does he who supplies](#)

the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith . . .” (Gal 3:1–5).

- D. Let me ask you then: This new year, do you want the Spirit to be supplied to you and work miracles among you and lead you onward in sanctification unto glory? Paul is saying here, it will not come by relying on your own strength. It will come by hearing the word of God. Therefore, let me encourage you: Take up this old book and read!

(4) Because It Awakens Faith

- A. We talked about this last week, if I recall, but Paul in [Rom 10](#), says something quite profound to this point: “[F]aith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (v. 17).
1. The clear implication is that without the hearing of the word of God, there can be no occasion for faith. The hearing, when it is accompanied by the Spirit, is the means by which God awakens faith.
- B. If faith, as the author of Hebrews puts it, is “[the conviction of things not seen](#)” (Heb 11:1), well, how is it that we come to learn of these unseen things at all? Answer: the word of God. It’s by the word that we hear of things we currently don’t see.
1. We hear of His great love for us, of His Son’s death for us, of His commitment to keep us and bring us into the new world He will usher in on the last day—and by faith we are convicted of the truth of such things though we don’t yet fully see the outworking of it all with our eyes.
- C. Now I don’t mean to imply in this that the process is automatic, as if, somehow, the moment you start reading the word of God faith awakens. It may be at times be as quick as this, but certainly not always. Often reading the word of God initiates what the Scriptures call the fight of faith in your heart.
1. You open the old book, and you see some truth or some promise, and you don’t feel it’s true for you. So what do you do? Close it and say: “O well, maybe next year?” No! May it never be. If God said it is true, whether you feel it or not. So you throw yourself at the foot of Jesus like that man in [Mark 9:24](#): “I believe; help my unbelief!”
- D. Maybe you feel shot through with sin, dirty, guilty. You can’t believe that you would be accepted, counted righteous before a holy God after what you’ve done. But there it is on the page: “[T]o the [one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness](#)” (Rom 4:5). Everything in you feels like you have to work for this, you have to pay God back, you have to clean yourself up. But there it is. Christ’s work is enough. Christ has paid God back for you. Christ has washed you. Christ has justified you.
1. And so you read, and you pray, and you cry, and, if God be merciful, the Spirit falls, and faith awakens.

- E. Does anyone in here struggle with doubt or unbelief? In those moments perhaps it is reading from this old book that you feel least likely to help, but God says it is precisely where help shall be found. So let me encourage you once more: Take up this old book and read!

(5) Because It Produces Fruit

- A. At the beginning of every new year, you always hear people tossing around that little catch-phrase: “New year, new you.” It sounds nice. Maybe they’re talking this being the year you’re going to finally shed those pounds. Or maybe they’re referring to you finally getting financial security. Whatever the case, I think most of us now roll our eyes and see the sort of gimmicky play behind this.
1. But, I do think, God could say the same thing, not in an underhanded or deceptive way of course, if we would, in fact, commit ourselves to reading His word.
- B. God talks about His word as seed. And, if morning by morning, you give yourself to scattering seed into the soil of your heart, you will start to see it bearing fruit in your life. Things in you will change.
1. Listen to Col 1:3-6: “³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth . . .”
 - a. If the new year is one devoted to reading God’s word, to planting and nourishing gospel truth deep in the soil of your heart, it really will bring about a new you.
- C. Do you have hopes to grow in love for God and neighbor? Do you have holy ambition to be more like Christ, more useful to the advance of His kingdom in the world? Do you want to be a fruitful, flourishing Christian? Let me encourage you once more: Take up this old book and read!

(6) Because It Is Our Weapon in the War

- A. When Jesus is facing temptation from the devil in the wilderness after his baptism, three times the temptation comes, and three times the response is . . . do you remember? “It is written . . .” And he quotes from the word of God in the devil’s face.
- B. Paul takes up this idea of spiritual warfare in Eph 6 and he starts talking about our battle is not “against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12).
1. He says therefore that we need to take up the whole armor of God. And he talks about the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation and all these other things.
 - a. But do you want to know, in this list at least, what he identifies as the only offensive weapon we have in this warfare against Satan and his forces of darkness? “[T]he sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (v. 17).

- C. Let me ask you something: If war was declared between nations and you were drafted to go to the frontlines for the sake of America, when the day came for you to join the fight, do you think for a moment that you would ever actually forget your weapon?
1. You were too worried getting your affairs in order in the morning, or getting your uniform just right, or you were up late facetimeing with your wife the night before, it just slipped your mind. Such a thing would never happen. That gun would be your life and death on that battlefield.
 - a. And yet how many of us enter our days without a thought for the spiritual war we are in and without concern to carry for ourselves the sword, the one weapon we have been given for this fight? Maybe it's been so in 2018, or 2017, or for as long as you can remember, but may it not be so in 2019!
- D. Do you feel tempted? Do you feel drawn in and trapped in some way by the devil? Are you often given over to sin. Then, let me encourage you: Take up this old book and read!

(7) Because It Satisfies Our Souls

- A. The word of God, because it is all of these things we've just delineated and so much more, satisfies our souls. For this let me simply read to you a few verses from [Psa 119](#):
1. ["The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces" \(v. 72\).](#)
 2. ["How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" \(v. 103\).](#)
 3. ["I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold" \(v. 127\).](#)
 4. ["I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments" \(v. 131\).](#)
 5. ["I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil" \(v. 162\).](#)
 6. ["My tongue will sing of your word, for all your commandments are right" \(v. 172\).](#)
- B. You want to be satisfied, right? You want to be full? Enough with the emptiness, always searching—maybe if I get that girl or that boy, maybe if I get that job or that promotion, maybe if I move here or there. Bring your longings to this old book. Here you shall meet with God and He will satisfy you in a way you never thought possible. Therefore, I say again, O would you take up this old book and read!

How?

- A. Now, there is so much I would want to say with regard to the how—how do I do this, how do I give this Bible reading thing a go? But let me give you quickly four suggestions I think might help in this.

(1) Get A Good Bible

- A. On this I'd like to recommend to you in particular the ESV Study Bible. Listen, the Bible is an intimidating read, right? It's not something you just take with you on your summer vacation to the beach and just kind of lounge about and peruse. It's long, it's complex, it's confusing, it's a few thousand years removed from our context. We need help. For goodness sake, I went to seminary, I've devoted my life to studying this book, and I need help.

- B. Getting a good study Bible like the ESV Study Bible, as you're reading through and just scratching your head, of course you pray, of course you ask God for help, but you also receive help from those who are maybe a few steps ahead of you. You can look at the cross-references and maybe make connections that help you gain more understanding. You can read commentary on the verses and find your bearings in interpretation and things.
- C. Handing you a Bible and telling you to just read from cover to cover would be like me taking you out on a boat to the middle of the ocean, you've never swam before, and I just drop you in. No! You need floaties, you need lessons, you need help. The ESV Study Bible is the best I'm aware of for this. I commend it to you.

(2) Get A Good Plan

- A. Before I put forward a suggestion on this, let me just give you a few quick stats to help you see what we're dealing with when it comes to reading the Bible.
 - 1. First, I wonder if you know that it takes about 70 hours to read the Bible cover to cover. ESV audio Bibles online run for about 74.5 hours. Now, at first that sounds like an awful lot, but do you realize that if you divide that by 365 days a year we are talking about reading for around 15 minutes a day and you will have gotten through the entire Bible in a year?
 - 2. Second, to help you see this from another angle, I wonder if you know that there are 1,189 chapters in the Bible. Again, this sounds like an overwhelming number, but when you divide it by 365 days, it comes out to about 3 chapters a day (3.25).
- B. Now, imagine you want to try to read through the Bible in about a year or so. You know it's about 15 minutes a day, 3 chapters a day. How are you going to break that up? What's going to be your plan?
 - 1. Do you just attempt to move from start to finish. Some may find that good for them. I have heard of too many starting this way and dying out even by Leviticus. It's too hard to understand. It doesn't seem immediately edifying. And you know Jesus isn't going to show up for like another 8 months of reading! So people tap out and are done.
 - 2. Now, there are many helpful plans at this point, but the one I like the best is quite simple. You start simultaneously in Genesis, Job, and Matthew and you just read one chapter from each. This essentially divides the Bible into thirds and, assuming an even pace, you will finish each section at approximately the same time.
 - a. The two major benefits to this that I've experienced are: (1) It's balanced; (2) It teaches you to read towards Jesus. The tensions and struggles and promises and shadows and things you see in your OT reading find fulfillment in Jesus as you do your NT reading. It's amazing!
- C. So maybe you read one chapter from each of those places and you choose one word or phrase or verse or section that the Spirit particularly draws your attention to and you do a deep-dive. Which leads to . . .

(3) Get A Good Method

- A. For this I commend to you what I've called the DNA method of Bible study. I don't have time to go into it now. I preached a couple sermons on the idea a while back with the Sacred Path stuff, and I put that path on a bookmark for you to keep in your Bibles.
 - 1. DNA stand for Discover, Nurture, and Apply. You'll find questions on that bookmark to help you get started. Take those into your Bible reading. Pray through them. Journal on them. Ask them until it becomes almost second nature to connect all of Scripture to Jesus and the gospel and to bring those truths from head to heart to hand.
- B. Next week I hope to have a booklet for you detailing more about this Sacred Path if you're interested.

(4) Get A Good Friend

- A. This cannot go unsaid. A good friend is a great help in the journey. O what if we were a church that read the Scriptures together?! Grab someone. Ask them for accountability and support. Consider getting together every week or so. Maybe you each discuss how it's going the ways God has been speaking to you in your own time with Him in His word. Maybe you even select a book of the Bible that you will read together one chapter at a time, going through those DNA questions or something like that.
- B. The bottom line is this: God wants to meet with us! He wants to speak with us, to commune with us, to supply us with His Spirit, to awaken faith, to make us fruitful, to give us victory in the war against sin and Satan, to satisfy our souls. And He does all these through this old book. Let's take it up this year and read!