

IS THE BIBLE WORTH READING?



IS THE BIBLE WORTH READING? Lemuel K Washburn, atheist of reknown and a scourge of religionists, answers the question in an essay of the same title by saying, *“That depends. If a man is going to get his living by standing in a Christian pulpit, I should be obliged to answer, Yes! But if he is going to follow any other calling, or work at any trade, I should have to answer, No! There is absolutely no information in the Bible that man can make any use of as he goes through life. The Bible is not a book of knowledge. It does not give instruction in any of the sciences. It furnishes no help to labor. It is useless as a political guide. There is nothing in it that gives the mechanic any hint, or affords the farmer any enlightenment in his occupation.”*

Washburn is entitled to his ideas about the Bible. If, like him, one believes that there is no God perhaps for such a person the Bible is not worth reading, apart from the possibility that by reading it one might be lead to believe in God. For those who believe in God there is no question that the Bible is a book of knowledge. There is no other volume of which I am aware that sets out the problem with the human condition, the reason we find ourselves in our present grim predicament and the solution God has provided to extricate us from a pointless and hopeless life. This is the most important knowledge there can be, albeit based upon faith. Additionally, no one can read Proverbs without realising that nearly every verse is pregnant with practical counsel for every day living and human relations. Take for example the following quotations:

“He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin. The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.” Prov 13: 3 & 4

“A mocker resents correction; he will not consult the wise. A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit. The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly. All the days of the oppressed are wretched, but the cheerful heart has a continual feast. Prov 15:12-15

The authors of the many self-help books that are around could learn much from the wise man Solomon about how to fulfil one’s potential and get the best out of life. People are paying big money to attend seminars that share concepts that could be got for free in the Bible. Whatever one’s profession or trade there is much in the Bible that one can find useful. The Bible also provides guidance for important decisions, strength, when facing circumstances that are beyond us and comfort when in despair.

The greatest value of reading Bible is of course that of knowing that that we have not been left in this sinful world to drift along without the prospect of anything better. John 3: 16-18 rings with that sense of hope and assurance: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.” There is a story that is told over and over of a man who had never read the Bible and who got hold of a copy for the first time. He began reading it and sometime afterwards exclaimed to his wife, “If this Book is true, we are lost!” Then he read on and not long afterward shouted to his wife, “If this Book is true, we can be saved!” That is the real value of the Bible and the supreme reason why it is worth reading.

Failure to read the Bible robs us of one of the greatest resources that God has provided to help us have a fulfilling and purposeful life. Woodrow Wilson, USA President from 1913 - 1921 said, “I am sorry

for the men who do not read the Bible every day. I wonder why they deprive themselves of the strength and of the pleasure."

One of the characteristics of being a Christian is that we accept the Bible as God's revelation to us. If so, one cannot be considered a Christian unless one reads the Bible and seeks to know God's will as revealed in Scripture for him or her individually and for the human family. We often speak about the need to communicate with God and see this as vital in building a relationship with Him. God has many ways to communicate with the human family but the Bible is one of the most effective, in that it catalogues God's interaction with man and reveals, even though imperfectly but sufficiently, the plan of salvation. There is a view that Bible reading is more important than prayer. This is based on the understanding that in prayer we tell God what is on our heart while in Bible reading we learn what is on God's heart.



Rowan Williams, the current Archbishop of Canterbury, is known as a very reflective church leader. In his Larkin-Stuart Lecture in Toronto in 2007 he said, "One of the things that most clearly and universally identifies Christians as Christians is that they habitually read the Bible or have the Bible read to them. From the most liberal to the most conservative, from Pentecostals in Venezuela to Orthodox in Albania, those who call themselves Christians are engaged in a complex and a varied set of relationships with this written text, relationships which shape the patterns of worship, teaching and ethical discourse."

Dwight Moody said to a man who claimed that he did not have enough time to read the Bible, "My friend, if you are too busy to read the Bible every day you are busier than Almighty God ever intended any human being should be, and you had better let some things go and take time to read the Bible."

God will not necessarily love us more because we read the Bible but without reading it we cannot understand the depth and the magnitude of His love for us. Without reading the Bible it is also doubtful that we will understand the premise on which our faith is based. We may join others in attending church and participating in various worship activities but are not able to defend our faith when required to do so. Members who do not read the Bible are easily misled by those who come with ear-tingling doctrines which sound plausible but which are not anchored in the word of God. "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.'" John 8:31, 32

Another important reason why the Bible is worth reading is its potential to foster spiritual growth. The athletes who are preparing for the 2012 Olympics in London know that if they must do well and, hopefully, win medals it is essential that they submit to the discipline of a particular diet. The same principle applies to Christians. We too need to feed on a diet that builds our spiritual muscles and bones and makes us resilient in the face of temptations and overwhelming odds. Job sets a good example for us when he said, "I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread. One of the defences Jesus used against the Devil in the Wilderness of Temptation was His knowledge of Scripture. With that knowledge He was able to parry the attacks of the evil one.

One of our great needs as a church is to recapture our emphasis on scripture, not merely in words but in actions. This is also true of most Christian organisations. There is a growing view that the trend in recent times towards a 'people-centred, experiential and feelings orientated spirituality' has produced a departure from a faith that is based on knowledge and understanding. Consequently, the reading and exposition of the Bible has been reduced and dispensed with at worst.

So, is the Bible worth reading? The answer is a resounding YES! I took advantage of the January sales by buying a vacuum cleaner at half-price. It was a strange looking one, more in the configuration of Dr Who's Tardis than a vacuum cleaner. However, after spending time reading the manual that came with it, I was able to impress my wife with the speed and thoroughness with which I was able to vacuum the carpet in the lounge. The Bible is the manual which our heavenly Father has provided for our lives. We ignore it at our peril. "The vigour of our spiritual life will be in direct proportion to the place held by the Bible in our life and thoughts." George Muller

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