

Delighting in God's Word

The greatest privilege of the true Christian is his relationship with God.

Regenerated believers are welcomed into the presence of Almighty God and are granted free audience. As part of God's family, in Christ, they can talk to God, hear God and know God. The greatest power and authority in the universe deigns to bring converted sinners into his family and fellowship with them. There is no greater privilege at all.

The hope of the Christian is that, when the Son of God returns in glory and splendour, his body will be changed in an instant to be a glorious body, his sanctification is completed, his old nature finally removed and an eternity awaits of material fellowship with God on a restored earth. Heaven and earth finally meet once more in glorious harmony, without any sin, and Christians form the population of the kingdom of God in Christ.

Meanwhile, genuine believers long to know God as their Father more fully. In the plan of God, this matter has been taken care of by the provision of the Word of God in written form.

Jesus is the full Word of God

The Word of God is the full expression of the mind of God. The prime revelation of this Word is the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Jn 1:1-14

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person. Heb 1:1-3

Jesus, the Word, is the full expression of the invisible God; the 'brightness of his glory and the express image of his person'.

'Brightness' [*apaugasma*] means effulgence, shining forth, of a light coming from a luminous body, or 'out-raying'. It means that Christ perfectly reflects the majesty of God.

'Express image' [*charakter*] is the instrument used for engraving or carving; the mark stamped upon that instrument or wrought out on it, an impression; the exact expression of any person or thing, marked likeness, precise reproduction in every respect, i.e. facsimile.

Jesus is the complete representation of the invisible God in every respect – but in a man.

In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Col 2:9

Thus to understand what God is like one only has to study the Person of Jesus. He is the Word and full expression of God.

The written Word is the expression of Jesus

In the same way, the written word is the written expression of Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity. The Bible is the manifestation of the character, glory and work of Christ.

Then He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?' And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Lk 24:25-27

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote -- Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph'. Jn 1:45

The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Rev 19:10

Therefore, exhaustive study of the Bible will reveal an understanding about the character of Jesus, and this in turn will grant an understanding of the mind and ways of God.

It therefore behoves believers to delight in the word of God because the more that you appreciate and understand God's word, the more you will understand the Person of God.

Since knowing God is the duty of believers, we need to be people that delight in God's word.

OT saints delighted in God's word

Even though OT saints did not understand the fulness of the workings of salvation,¹ or the details of the Trinity,² and even though they did not have the Holy Spirit permanently indwelling them,³ yet still they delighted in God's word.

It was clear to them that by studying God's word (which would have only have been small portions on scrolls for most of them) they could understand God's ways; i.e. his character.

I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. Ps 119:15

OT saints understood that God's word had been inspired in heaven and given to men in order to understand divine precepts. They wanted to know how to behave, but they also wanted to know what God was like.

¹ 1 Pt 1:10-12, 'Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven -- things which angels desire to look into'.

² This is revealed in the NT. The OT emphasises that there is one God (Deut 6:4), but gives hints about more than one person in the Godhead (e.g. Gen 1:26, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness').

³ Jn 7:39, 'But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified'.

God's laws taught men what was righteous behaviour; the law showed how to live right. However, by teaching men what were righteous actions, it was also teaching what God thought about certain issues. Thus the Ten Commandments, for example, show that God hates murder, stealing and idolatry. The more you studied the details of God's laws, the more you understood the ethics (the nature and grounds of moral thought and action) in the mind of God.

Thus one could easily build up a picture that God desired truth, honesty, humility, sacrificial love, mercy, justice, holiness and so on. The more you studied the easier it was to list the attributes of God character. Without knowing God's attributes one cannot know God in any real sense at all.

But further study shows that even OT saints could learn that God loves family, community, doing good to others, assisting alien sojourners, helping the poor, supporting the weak and vulnerable and fighting for the oppressed.

Negative features also showed the character of God such as punishing the wicked, condemning oppression, hating sin, being angry at wickedness, judging with equity and impartiality, defeating invaders and inflicting vengeance on those under condemnation.

Despite not having the advantages of New Covenant believers, OT saints were able to have a vast understanding about the nature, character and actions of God. Thus they delighted in his word because it taught them so much about God.

His delight *is* in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.

Ps 1:2

I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word. Ps 119:16

My soul breaks with longing for Your judgments at all times. Ps 119:20

Your testimonies also *are* my delight *and* my counsellors. Ps 119:24

Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. Ps 119:35

And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love. Ps 119:47

I delight in Your law. Ps 119:70

Your law *is* my delight. Ps 119:77

The NT application of the Word

In the OT devotion to God was expressed more in terms of delighting in God's word and obeying that word because the Messiah had not yet come. The Deliverer sent by God and promised by Moses was hoped for but had not been seen. So a believer's attention turned to the only expression they had directly from God – his Word (prophecy was an extension of this word and not separate from it).

In the NT this is very different; believers have the actual Person of Jesus Christ, who is God in the flesh, to direct their worship towards. Thus the focus of the NT is not the written words but the Person behind those words.

The apostles not only brought the final words of the risen Christ to his people, but they also centred their delight in God upon the Person of Jesus Christ.

The references to the written word are very practical, doctrinal and full of application. Believers must understand and obey the word in order to glorify Jesus Christ. While we delight in the word of God our worship is devoted to the Person behind that word.

Knowing Jesus does not diminish our attention on the word of God but rather enhances it because we can see how well all of the Bible illustrates and informs us about Jesus, the heart of Scripture.

The saints under the old covenant understood the principles of divine things from studying God's word, but we can see the Person that inspired those principles.

Thus NT saints under the new covenant still delight in the word of God even more than OT saints because they know Jesus.

In fact, if you do not delight in the words that speak about Jesus in type, illustration, poetry, historical narrative, statute and doctrinal instruction, then you cannot be centred in Christ.

The modern problem

Shocking, as it may seem, there is a very great problem at the heart of the modern Christian church; even evangelical churches. It is that many supposed Christians have ceased to delight in the word of God.

There are a number of reasons for this, which cannot be detailed here, which include:

- There has been a full-on propaganda war on the church for over 100 years stimulated by Satan and one which has, by and large, been completely missed by recent church leaders. This war has taken many forms using intellectual and emotional strategies, but the chief objective has been to take people's attention off the Bible.
- Intellectual strategies include: attempts to denigrate the authority of God's word by denial of verbal inspiration,⁴ suggesting that it is full of myths,⁵ that the text is corrupt,⁶ that the text needs to be interpreted very differently,⁷ and multiple Bible versions that corrupt the actual words chosen by God. These strategies were confronted by multiple faithful people going back over 100 years.
- Emotional strategies: in the last 50 years there have been increasing strategies to denigrate the Bible and emphasise the authority of men in its place. These include: Charismatic theology and practice,⁸ Charismatic emphasis upon false prophecy,⁹ Charismatic authoritarianism whereby 'apostles' and 'prophets' usurped the place of the Bible, Emergent Church practices,¹⁰ mysticism,¹¹ modern Gnosticism,¹² and so on.

⁴ Liberalism.

⁵ As in Modernism, Evolutionary Theory and Liberalism.

⁶ Higher Criticism theories.

⁷ False teachings and Liberal commentaries.

⁸ Which tended to place personal experiences above Biblical truth and were often anti-intellectual and thus anti-dogmatic.

⁹ Charismatic leaders have openly stated that human prophecies were more important than the dusty dead words of the Bible. False doctrines abounded; such as Rhema words were God's living word now through inspired people.

¹⁰ Their Postmodernism denied dogmatic theology and intellectualism replacing these with feelings and community ideas.

¹¹ Where feelings took priority over Biblical doctrine. Pietism and Quietism fall into this bracket.

¹² Where special divinely inspired mysteries opened up by a man were more important than God's written word.

Most modern church leaders have no clue that all these are satanic strategies to wean people away from Scripture and on to men or subjective feelings.

As a result of these attacks on the Bible, it is now common to see hordes of people go to attend church meetings without taking any personal Bible. In fact, churchgoers admit to not reading their Bible much or at all, and study it even less. Some deny that the Bible is even necessary today.

The result of this is that people do not understand Biblical doctrines at all; not even fundamental doctrines like justification by faith. Two things result from this:

The first is that such folk are open to all sorts of false teachings. Thus multiple heresies now plague the church in an unprecedented wave of error and wickedness. Never in history has there been such a plethora of deception in the church.

The second matter is that such folk do not understand anything serious about God. They do not know his attributes, how he feels about things, how he reacts to things, what he wants and so on. Thus these people have no guidance and then fall into even deeper errors and cause calamities in their life. The whole church became one big mess of confusion – which is what the devil wanted all the time to make the church ineffective to properly confront his strategies.

In Britain, at least, only handfuls of people in communities up and down the country have any clue at all about Biblical doctrine and are thus able to fellowship with God effectively and properly defeat the enemy.

Illustration

Imagine a man married to a woman he claims to love dearly. For some reason the woman has to go away for a prolonged period on some vital errand. To keep up the relationship with her husband she writes long letters to him explaining all that is going on and what her plans are.

What would it suggest if the husband never read her letters at all, or perhaps only briefly scanned them occasionally? It would suggest that the love he claims to have for his wife was not genuine at all. Faced without her actual presence, surely he would lap up every word she wrote and would study every letter assiduously.

This is what many modern churchgoers are like. They claim to love the Lord Jesus Christ but their experience testifies that they do not.

Delight in the Word

It is the privilege of Christians to delight in the Word of God.

This is first done by worshipping Jesus as Lord and King of all things. Our great responsibility above all other things is to worship Jesus.

Now by worship I do not mean attending a worship service where there is loud music and repetitive banal choruses. Nor do I mean singing. Neither do I mean listening to a favourite 'worship CD' (not that there is such a thing). Nor do I mean speaking or singing in tongues, which is something that has long passed away. Nor do I mean objective praise (which may be an aspect of the expression of worship).

Worship is reverent submission; acknowledging Jesus as your superior and bowing your heart in submission and adoration of him as Lord of all. This may be performed anywhere, at any time, alone or in groups. It is submission that delights in God.

The prime method of delighting in God's Word is worship of Jesus.

But the second method of delighting in God's Word is striving to see how the written word, the Bible, manifests the character of Jesus and teaches us the wisdom of God. Jesus is the Wisdom of God and the Bible is the written record of that wisdom as it is revealed to men in multiple styles: poetry, history, instruction, law, hymns, typology, symbolism, allegory, wisdom, warnings, denunciation, and apocalyptic literature. Some people will respond to certain forms more than others so that all can learn about the glory of God through Christ.

The great joy of Bible study is discovering what one style teaches regarding a certain divine aspect and then how another style dovetails into that and expands one's understanding. Doctrinal understanding is enhanced by understanding symbolism and typology.¹³ Historical narratives are further opened up by poetic descriptions of those events in the Psalms. Apocalyptic passages are made more clear by examining older symbolic passages that carried the same themes.¹⁴ Even specific historical events can illustrate later dogmatic themes with power.¹⁵

The amazing thing about Bible study is that the more you assiduously delve into it, the more you discover is there. A cursory glance will reveal nothing, but years of study will open up marvellous details.

Conclusion

The gift of the Bible to the church is priceless. Thus people gave their lives in history to preserve it and make it available to ordinary people in their own language. In every century when leaders stood on the word of God the nation improved and prospered.

The Bible is a divine thing given to humans to cherish. It is an unspeakable privilege to have it. To ignore this precious gift is a sin so terrible that the Day of Judgement will come as a shock to those who did so; no matter what religious name they called themselves.

Throughout history the men that have achieved great things for God, the theologians, church leaders, preachers, evangelists and statesmen, have all been, without exception, men that were centred upon God's word and who studied it carefully.

We could safely say, 'no study; no success'.

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¹³ Thus the use of typological references in the argument in the Book of Hebrews.

¹⁴ Revelation uses similar themes to Daniel and Zechariah.

¹⁵ E.g. the act of material creation sheds light on regeneration, which is a new creation. The judgment of the Israelites in the wilderness are specifically said to be for our wisdom regarding the discipline of God (1 Cor 10:6).