

How Do We Use Our Bibles?

¹ Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. ² Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.

... ⁶ Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." ⁷ What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? ⁸ And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

⁹ Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011.

They say that repetition is the mother of all learning. That is true. The more you do something, the better you are at it. The opposite is true. If you don't do something for a long time, you get rusty at it. Take mathematics, for example. We use math everyday. But there are some math problems we haven't used in a long time. I remember my kids asking for help. I was pretty good at math. But I haven't studied math since then, and there are some things I am rusty at. If they asked me to help them find the area of a cylinder, I can't remember how to do that. I would have to take their book, relearn how and then I can help.

The same can be said about the Bible. The more you use it. But do we sometimes become rusty when it comes to God's Word? That is why we need to listen to Moses in our Old Testament reading. So we don't become rusty, he tells us how to use the Bible. It is simple. Read it, don't add or subtract from it, and finally do what it says.

I. Hear God's Word.

The forty years of wandering in the wilderness is over. The Israelites are poised to enter the promised land. What advice does Moses give his people? Does he tell them how to pack? Does he tell them how to use their money wisely? No. He goes back to the basics. He reminds them to listen to God's Word. "***¹ Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you.***"

It may sound silly to remind believers to listen to God's Word. You would think that is a given. But it isn't. Let me take you into our gospel reading. The Pharisees were in church every week. They heard and even memorized God's Word. Yet what did Jesus say about them? "***"Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites. As it is written: These people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. ⁷ They worship me in vain, teaching human rules as if they were doctrines.***" The Pharisees heard God's Word often, but they didn't listen to it. Instead, they made up their own rules and religion.

Yes, we can become rusty if we don't open up our Bibles and read them. Yes, we can become rusty if we don't take advantage of every worship service or Bible class. Yes, the best advice parents can give their college bound children, above good grades, is to keep on listening to God's Word. But even if we do hear it often, how often have the words gone only as far as our ears? I mean, we could hear God's Word about forgiveness, yet on Monday morning we avoid that co-worker because of a fight last week. Doesn't sound like we listened much about forgiveness.

So, back to the basics with the Bible. Hear it, and not just with the ears. Allow me to give you this advice. When you read a passage or two or a chapter, don't just read it. Ask, "Why is this word used here? What does it mean?" Ask other questions, too, like, "What sin is this text pointing out in my life? What comfort does God give me? What should I pray for? What is God telling me to do?" For example, fathers in the congregation, I want you read Ephesians 6:4, "***Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.***" Ask these questions: What sin does this text show in my life? What does exasperate mean? How can raising my children in the instruction of the Lord keep me from exasperating them? What should I pray for?" So, the first step in how to use our Bibles may sound simple, but it is one we often neglect. Listen to it.

II. Don't add to or subtract from the Bible.

Another basic approach to the Bible is to let it speak to you, all of it. "***² Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.***" If I asked you what you added to the Bible, you would get mad at me and say, "I didn't add anything to it." We know we shouldn't add to it or take anything away from it. But we do more than we think.

Of course, these words warn us to not take any books or chapters of the Bible and throw them out, or to take our magic markers and blacken them out. And it also forbids us from adding books or chapters or verses. But there are far easier and more destructive ways of adding to or subtracting from it. Can you imagine if we never talked about the cross or forgiveness or God's love anymore? Can you imagine if we preached only the law of God, do this or else, do that or else? Can you imagine if we subtracted the gospel? You will live only in fear of judgment, period. We have no Savior.

And are there parts we want to ignore? Let's say we dwell on the Word of God which says, "Children, honor your father and mother," and the child says, "I know, BUT they haven't earned my respect." That is adding to the Word. Nowhere does it say parents or teachers or police or government leaders or whoever must first earn our respect. We find other ways of adding to or subtracting from the Bible. We don't want to submit to everyone. We want to love only some and not others. See how easy it is to add or subtract from it?

There is one part we like to subtract. Again, back to our gospel reading. Jesus said, ***"Everyone, listen to me and understand. ¹⁵ There is nothing outside of a man that can make him unclean by going into him. But the things that come out of a man are what make a man unclean. ... ²¹ In fact, from within, out of people's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual sins, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, unrestrained immorality, envy, slander, arrogance, and foolishness. ²³ All these evil things proceed from within and make a person unclean."***

Is it nature or nurture? I mean, does evil pop up in our lives because some evil in society is influencing us? No. Rather, there are bad things going on in society because it is composed of bad people. Sin comes from within the heart of each human. We don't want to hear that murder and greed and slander and arrogance lives in our hearts. We would like to subtract that from our Bibles!

God is telling not to subtract even the bad news in the Bible because he has some good news that goes along with it. Did you know that Jesus was a murderer? Did you know that he was greedy? Jesus committed no sins. He did not murder anyone. He never had an ounce of greed. But he became these things for us. He became he murderer and slanderer we all are and was punished in our place.

The words are written that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing in him we will not perish, but have everlasting life. So don't add or take away things from the Bible so you don't add to or subtract from your salvation.

III. Do what it says.

There is one other basic thing about the Bible, do what it says. ***"⁶ Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' ⁷ What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? ⁸ And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?"***

Most likely, if you pray in public, some people may respect you, while some people will look at you funny. But they all will notice one thing: how close you are to God. Even the mocker has to admit that you are so close to God that all you have to do is pray and he listens.

And we want to walk with God. I remember a show on cable called, "Scared Straight." They took troubled teens and walked them through an actual prison, and it is scary, prisoners yelling, right up in their faces, everything. But it is interesting because all the prisoners tell the kids the same thing: don't do what I did. Don't go down the same road I went down.

Friends, as redeemed children of God, we have the same attitude. We don't want to go back into unbelief. We don't want to pursue the same sinful things that dominated our lives before. We see God's Word, even the commands, as good. We want to follow the good path in the Bible.

And when we do what it says, people will notice that we are wise and have understanding. Only fools can argue against the family unit as described by God in his Word. Even our detractors will notice it though they will not admit it. You know, if a business owner was a pagan, logically he would want to hire Christians because they listen when God says to obey their masters even if they are harsh. You would think any government would want to promote Christianity. Why? Because God wants Christians to submit to their governing authorities and pay taxes willingly. What a testimony we give about God to others if we simply do what it says!

That's the basics of the Bible. Listen to it. Don't add to or subtract from it in anyway. Believe it and do what it says. You can't get any more basic than that. And if you do, you may find yourself being less rusty and better at it. INJ Amen.