

WHY DO YOU READ THE BIBLE?

Joe Slater

A friend posted an interesting observation on his Facebook page. I didn't write it down word-for-word, but here is the essence of what it said:

"There are two kinds of people who read the Bible. The first reads with an open mind to learn what the text actually says. The second reads to find validation of what they already believe."

In over four decades of preaching, I've certainly found this to be so, and not only with people I've tried to teach. I also have to discipline myself not to misuse Scripture to justify a particular doctrine or practice. We rightly say that truth has nothing to fear from an honest examination; but setting aside a long-held and cherished belief is no small challenge!

Someone with no religious background may find it easy to read the Bible with an open mind. Learning the truth is simpler when you don't have to un-learn error first. However, even those with no religious upbringing may have pre-conceived ideas that conflict with God's word. If they're open-minded, they will exchange those false beliefs for Biblical truth.

If you believe in "infant baptism," you might try to justify it by appealing to circumcision in the Old Testament or examples of "household" baptisms in Acts. If you believe in universalism (everybody is saved), you might cite passages affirming God's love and His desire for all to be saved. A straight-forward, unbiased look at the text, however, paints a different picture! Baptism is for repentant believers, and while God does, indeed, desire all to be saved, the vast majority will be lost.

Why do **you** read the Bible? Be certain it is to learn and obey, not to validate what you already think!

Expecting Too Much?

I heard this story several years ago: "A young preacher had just moved to a new congregation. The brethren were thrilled with his first sermon. The next Lord's day, he preached the same sermon! However, most everyone concluded it was an oversight. But, the third Sunday, the same sermon — again! The elders met with their new preacher and asked, "Don't you have more than one sermon?" "Yes," was the reply, "I have many sermons; but you haven't done anything about the first one yet!"

Just a question: Was he expecting too much from his hearers? What did he have a right to expect? I remember Jesus saying this: "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken to a man who built his house on a rock . . ." He did expect men to listen and respond!

Have we been lulled into some strange sense that, when gospel preaching is done, we have the right to "turn it off" if it doesn't appeal to us? The whole tenor of the Scriptures is contrary to this attitude! Jesus once told His disciples, "He that heareth you, heareth me." Gospel preachers today have no "built in authority" as did the apostles who were endowed with the Holy Spirit, but they do have the right to expect to be heard when they speak "as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11).

As your preacher here at Buchanan Dam, I strive to present lessons that are thought-provoking, informative, and admonishing. I may not always succeed in this, but it's not for lack of trying. There is the other side of preaching, seldom thought of — the responsibility of the hearer. Jesus, you remember, admonished His hearers, "Take heed how you hear." Not only "what you hear," but how you hear.

The next time your preacher speaks on a difficult subject, or one that he knows you need to hear, bear with him "just a little." It may be one he has dreaded to present, but one he knows is needed if he is to please God!

--Clayton Arnold (Buchanan Dam, TX)

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"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:7).

Chameleon Or Not?

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2 NKJV).

My nephew Logan and I were driving to Santa Maria, CA where I was invited to share my work in the Philippines. Logan says, "I think Chameleons and insects that look like sticks are really cool!" Asking why these animals would camouflage themselves, and he thought for a few seconds and replied, "So they can hide from animals who want to eat them!"

It got quiet for a few miles as he turned his attention back to my iPad. I couldn't help but think about how these organisms of God's creation reflected on us. We've been transformed from this world and we no longer conform to this world.

I wonder what the world thinks when they see me? I pounded the pavement for 32 years as a mail carrier. One day returning from my route at the end of the day, my supervisor approached me and informed me a customer called in a complaint. I listened as he told me how I used profane language and was quite abusive. But he said, "I know that's not true as I've never heard a foul word leave your mouth." A fellow carrier, overhearing the conversation, came and said, "That was easy, you've been here over 30 years and I've never heard you use language like that either!" I just smiled.

Knowing God, I refuse to be a chameleon or stick insect. It's all too easy when times get hard and rough to act like those in this world. As a Christian, I must stand out! I will not hide!

When the world looks at us, what do they see? Do they see someone who is at peace with God and themselves? Do they see someone who has an aura of gratitude? One who is a peacemaker seeking peace rather than stirring up strife? Do they see a worker who gives one's employer a hard day's work for his pay? Or that of a Chameleon?

--Steven Prine (Turlock, CA)