

Do You Need to Renew Your Commitment to Study the Bible?

By Bob Young

I am concerned. I am concerned because in many places I see a declining emphasis on studying Scripture, because I see less focus on the message of the Bible in many sermons, because expository sermons that “expose” the meaning of the text are rare. I am concerned because more and more Christians know less and less about the Bible. I am concerned because in some churches “Bible study groups” are little more than book clubs, and because for too many Christians, study about the Bible has become a substitute for studying the Bible. Christians read books about the Bible instead of reading the Book! If faith is to survive in a hostile world, Christians must return to serious Bible study as a part of the dynamic of the shared community life of God’s people.

Since the concerns I mention are based on personal observations and my own experience, I want to make clear that I write first for those of “my tribe.” We who have been known for our commitment to Scripture are lagging and falling behind. Here are two approaches to the Bible study. Which group describes you and your church?

Option #1—Some folks and some churches are really “into” the Bible. As I talk with people across the Christian spectrum and read reports; I find that a lot of people in various Christ-focused churches are studying the Bible, loving it, thirsting and hungering. Many are finding in a renewed emphasis on the study of Scripture a message that is fresh and enjoyable, challenging and exciting. Believers in many different kinds of Christian churches are rediscovering Scripture. (Church history tells of various movements that rediscovered Scripture.)

Option #2—Some Christians do not like to study Scripture, they do not personally study and read the Bible, they do not know how to study, they do not know how to ask questions of the text, they do not know how to search out the meaning and message. They find Bible study boring—or at least less than exhilarating.

I want to put in a good word for Bible study. I want to motivate study of the Bible in place of study about the Bible. I want to encourage God’s people to lay aside secondary sources and countless books and return to the Bible, seeking to read and understand the message and meaning firsthand. I want to encourage God’s people to spend less time studying explanations and applications written by others, and to spend more time studying the Bible, using resources and guides as necessary to help with context, grammar, and vocabulary.

Let me share three reasons why a return to the study of the Bible is important.

First, the Bible has the power to mature and equip God’s people (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

- Everything needed in the Christian life is possible through Scripture—teaching, warning, correcting, and instructing.

Second, Bible study will help Christians mature and develop discernment through practice (Heb. 5:11-14)

- People who are excited about Bible study will grow spiritually
- Bible study is a natural activity in small groups and home groups focused on maturing in Christ
- Mature people can reach out to others effectively; many people in our world want to know and understand, many want to study the Bible
- Bible study will empower missions. A brother commented on his experience in India: all you have to do is teach them the Bible, the power is in the Word, the growth is automatic!

Third, discipleship involves teaching toward maturity (Matt. 28:19-20)

- Discipleship begins in baptism, discipleship is deepened by learning the way of Christ.

Why is Bible study that seeks to understand the text so often missing from the activities of the church? Why are there so many church groups that focus on shared activities, studying books about the Bible, and other peripheral matters? What is the situation in your church?

- Does your church have a good number of people who are able to teach the Bible? If not, evangelism and a rich community experience in the Word will almost invariably come up short.
- Does your church have people who are interested in study of the Bible? A church that is not interested in the Bible will soon lose its fervor for the things of God, satisfied with poor substitutes.
- Does the traditional focus on topical studies in your religious heritage discourage Bible study that genuinely wrestles with the text? Be honest as you think about the role of the Bible in your life and in your church.