

Biblical Revelation and Spiritual Growth / COB / 11.16.14

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: blank]** Good morning! Let's talk about parenting a difficult child.
- Let's suppose you had a difficult child, a boy though it could as easily be a girl. This child does not do what you ask or command, will not hear what is healthy for him or heed your warnings about what could be harmful. Essentially, this child is not listening to you at all and in a quite spoiled way goes about doing whatever strikes his fancy. What do you do about such a child? I am sure as the parent you would be frustrated most of the time.
 - **[Slide 2: title]** Y'all know where this is going? Let's suppose this child was you... and you had a parent called God, who gave you all the wisdom and direction you would ever need; he even wrote it down for you, so you could never get confused about it, forget it, or pretend you hadn't received it. But you ignored it, the teachings, the commands, the advice, and the warnings. You took that book of revelation and you stuck it on a shelf to gather dust or you sold it so you could buy another fatty hamburger or you put it prominently on the coffee table so everyone would think you are spiritual when really you are not. What should God do about such a difficult child?
- † What I really want to discuss is the value of scripture in the sanctification or spiritual growth process. I will tell you up front, that if you will not invest time in learning, understanding, and applying God's Word, then you will not remain spiritually healthy, you will not grow spiritually, you will not become the person God designed you to be, you will miss out on many blessings God has in store for you, and you will sinfully fail to carry out the mission God has for you.
- How could we think otherwise? This is God's revelation for you! We all say we want to hear from the Holy Spirit, but why should the Spirit bother speaking to us if we are ignoring everything he already revealed?
 - [relate my story...] Let's pray; then I will show how important this is...

Scripture and Sanctification

- † **[Slide 3: Joshua 1.7-8]** When Joshua was taking over leadership of the nation from Moses, one of the first things God told him is found in **Joshua 1.7-8 NIV**: [God told Joshua] **“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”**
- As the leader of God's people, as God's primary representative on Earth, to be successful Joshua needed to do what? a. do what he thought was right and trust God would bless it; b. follow his heart's desire, knowing he was entitled as God's chosen; c. work hard at discovering God's will and way of life and then humbly obey it. Which one? C, but how often do we follow A or B?
 - From where does that C concept come, do you know? Well see, if you were on the Joshua study and reflection program, you *would* know. It comes from God's revelation in Deuteronomy, which Moses wrote just before Joshua took over from him.

- **[Slide 4: Deuteronomy 17.18-20]** Deuteronomy 17.18-20 NIV: **When he [a Jewish king; Joshua was not a king, but he was the equivalent, anointed by God to rule over the nation in God's name] takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical priests. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.**
 - To have success, the king, the top banana, the primo representative of God on Earth, is not to think he is any better than the common people, so he is to handwrite a copy of the books of Moses, keep it with him all the time, read it every single day [even reflect on it day and night], and follow every word of it. That's what it takes to be successful in representing God, even if you are Joshua or David or Solomon.
 - What about if you are you? Maybe you are more vain than I am, but I know that I am not the caliber of man that Joshua, David, and Solomon were, so if to be successful in representing God they needed to be immersed daily in God's Word – reading, studying, memorizing, and reflecting on it – then I need to be immersed in it too, if I want to succeed for God.
 - Now be honest in your own mind... How many of you are not sure where your Bible is? If I came over to your house, never mind how messy the rest of the place is, would I find dust on your Bible? Would I find you are using your Bible as a doorstop, to elevate your bedroom tv, or as kindling for your fireplace?
 - Last year, I took a survey in this church. 42% of the adults and teens who responded said they were in their Bibles five or more days per week, which is great... but another 42% said they were in their Bibles rarely, three or fewer days per week; that's not healthy.
- † In **Ephesians 6.18**, Paul called the Word of God the Sword of the Spirit. It is our offensive weapon against temptation and deception, allowing us to fight evil with truth and goodness, just like Jesus did when Satan tempted him.
- **[Slide 5: Hebrews 4.12]** Hebrews 4.12 NIV: **For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow [in other words, it is so sharp it can separate what cannot be separated; why is that important, because of what comes next]; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.**
 - God's Word is our guidebook for life. It shows us how to live the way God designed us to live, the way he created and saved us to live, the way we can be his image and reflect his character. God's Word is our standard for all of life, and so it can judge our thoughts and even our attitudes of the heart, it can illuminate what is good and what is muck within us. Of course that only works if we presently are reading it...
- † **[Slide 6: Psalm 1]** The first psalm, **Psalm 1** begins [1.1-3 NIV]: **Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of [spiritual] mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither-- whatever they do prospers.**
- If you want to be spiritually healthy and spiritually growing you have to start spending time with God in his Bible daily. Think of all that is of the world which you take in on a daily basis – all the

advertising, the television and movies and websites and books, the news, the political talk, the opinions of your friends, all that, every day, all day – do you think it might influence the way you think and feel over time, since you are immersed in this culture?

- How can you counter the effects of what is evil, fleshly, tempting, or deceptive if you are not listening to God? And think of the balance of input: how many hours a day does the world get a chance to push its ideas on you, and how few minutes are you allowing God to do the same through his revelation?
- You know that Joshua failed to conquer the land, David conspired to commit murder and committed adultery, Solomon constructed temples to pagan gods... if they could fail when they drifted away from God's revelation, if they could fail to discern in themselves what sin still lurked in their hearts and minds, do you really think you are the exception, who can thrive without remaining immersed in God's revelation so that it can guide you?
- Oh, how we do deceive ourselves! I once thought this; that's what led me to the abyss from which I had to crawl back to God. The moment you think that, you have proved yourself wrong, because in that moment you are sinning, by going against what God has revealed in scripture.

† **[Slide 7: 1 Corinthians 2.11-13]** **1 Corinthians 2.11-13 NIV: For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us [his revelation, especially about Christ, but also about everything else in life]. This is what we speak [the teachings of the apostles], not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.**

- The apostles had Holy Spirit inspired words to share with the rest of us. And we all have the Holy Spirit helping us to understand those words.
- **[Slide 8: Psalms 119.1-12]** What good are those words? Earlier, we read Psalm 119.1-12. I won't read it again, but we have the words up on the screen. This psalm is about the value of God's Word, God's revelation, in the scriptures, and this psalm has 176 verses! There is a lot to say about the value of what God has revealed in scripture.
- This psalm says we are blessed if we are blameless and to be blameless is to walk according to God's revelation, which is what he expects of us. Then we will be obedient instead of sinful, walking the top line with God, seeking after him whole-heartedly.

† **[Slide 9: Psalm 119.104-105]** Later in the same psalm, it says: **Psalm 119.104-105 NIV: I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path. Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.**

- As we absorb God's revelation, we not only learn what is right, we begin to want what is right. God's Spirit interacts with God's Word in God's people to transform them to become like God's Son. [repeat...] And as we become like Christ, the Son of God, who was the perfect image of God the Father, we become what God created and saved us to be.

† **[Slide 10: John 8.31-32]** **John 8.31-32 NIV: To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."**

- This begins with the gospel truth, for when we accept the gospel promise in faith, we are born again spiritually, redeemed – or freed – from the power of sin, empowered to resist temptation, forgiven and restored in right relationship with God.
 - God’s truth extends to the rest of scripture, which frees us by countering the deceptions we face. Sometimes we have wrong thoughts because of our fallen flesh; sometimes we learn deceptive ideas from our fallen culture; and sometimes we are attacked with negative thoughts by demons, but the truth of God can counter all of these deceptions, and set us free from their dangerous effects.
 - **[Slide 11: Luke 11.28]** But the truth will set you free if and only if you become a true disciple of Christ, who remains in his Word. Jesus also said in **Luke 11.28 NIV: “Blessed ... are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”**
- † I said earlier that we all want to be led by the Spirit. If we are yielded to the Holy Spirit, he will lead us to invest time in the scriptures, since this is commanded by God. If we are submitted to Christ, then we will seek to follow his example *and* remain in his teaching, both of which mean we will invest time in the scriptures.
- The Holy Spirit will help us understand what we are reading, and – as I will show you in a few minutes – God also has provided our generation with an abundance of study tools and the collective knowledge and wisdom of 2000 years of scholarly and faithful study; all of which will help us make our time in the Bible more fun and more fruitful!
 - **[Slide 12: hand]** So we can use scripture – we can listen, read, memorize, study, and reflect on how to apply it – to bring us to conviction of how we need to change and enlightenment about how we must live, so we can honor God with obedience and stay within his blessings by walking the top line with him. Scripture can free us from deception, empower us against temptation, provide us with hope and encouragement, and reveal to us God’s perspective on all of life. And as I said earlier, the Holy Spirit will use our time in scripture to transform us to be like Christ.
- † **[Slide 13: John 17.17]** Jesus prayed to God the Father about his disciples in **John 17.17 NIV: “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”** In other words, God’s revelation in Scripture is truth that will sanctify or purify God’s people.
- **[Slide 14: Romans 12.2]** **Romans 12.2 NIV: Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.**
 - Again, I remind you that you are being inundated with the pattern of this world, and the inclination of the world and of your own flesh is that you would conform to this pattern; who wouldn’t want to fit in, be respected, be popular? Of course, we have learned in John that these desires kept some people from coming to saving faith.
 - The world is affecting your mind and your heart or soul, but God says you are not to conform to it, instead you are to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. How does that happen? Does renewal happen by watching reality tv? Does it happen by interacting on Facebook? Does it happen by ferrying your children to twenty activities every week?
 - No, it happens by grace, a work of the Holy Spirit; but one thing God says in scripture is that you need to invest time in learning and applying scripture in order to experience that

transformation. Renewal and transformation come as God's Spirit interacts with God's Word in God's people to transform them to become like God's Son.

- † **[Slide 15: 2 Timothy 3.16-17]** **2 Timothy 3.16-17 NIV: All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**
 - Scripture is God's revelation, inspired by him, and he will use it in you, if you bother to learn it, work to understand it, memorize and reflect upon it; he will use it in you to transform your character and reshape your thinking, so you become equipped for the work he has for you.
 - And note that I did not say merely learn it, right? You have to learn it *so that* you can apply it. It would do you no good if you were to know or even memorize the whole Bible, but you did not let it shape your thoughts, attitudes, decisions, and character.
 - **[Slide 16: James 1.22]** James said, **James 1.22 NIV: Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.**

- † Reading the Bible consistently leads to an understanding of the values and philosophies God wants us to develop. We can develop the pattern of God's reasoning, and then handle any situation, even if we don't know a specific biblical command that is relevant. We can then effortlessly improve our intimacy with God, because our thoughts and the Holy Spirit's prompts will be in agreement.

- † **[Slide 17: flow chart]** We are distributing a handout with this flow chart on the first page. This is our eleventh sermon about spiritual growth this year, as we progressed through this flow chart, which shows the process God uses to grow us. What we could not show on the chart is that God's revelation in the Bible plays a role in every box, in every decision for the believer to take another step of growth.
 - We will not submit to Christ's authority in our lives and to his teachings unless we know from scripture that this is God's revealed will, it is absolutely necessary as a part of the Christian life, and it will benefit us greatly.
 - We will not yield to the Holy Spirit moment by moment unless we understand from scripture that this is the way a believer walks through the day and stays faithful in the light, unless we understand that each decision must be submitted to God's will and acted out in God's character.
 - We will not be led by the Holy Spirit unless we learn from scripture that this is possible and how to discern the Spirit's voice among the many influences in our minds.
 - We cannot appropriate our new nature and live in freedom and victory, unless we learn from scripture about this new nature, our victory in Christ, our freedom from temptation's power, and the fullness of what it means to be in God's love, in his family, in his kingdom.
 - We will not resist evil in our lives or our own sin nature, unless we learn from scripture about the Spirit's empowerment, our victory over sin and thus our freedom from its grasp, and how to discern deceptions and accusations in our minds.
 - We will not repent and confess of specific sins unless we learn from scripture that we must do so and that repentant confession carries great benefits.
 - We cannot obey unless we understand from scripture how God has commanded us to live.

- We will not worship properly or sufficiently unless we learn from scripture what God demands in the way of praise.
 - We will not pray sufficiently and in the many ways open to us unless we learn from scripture how to do it properly.
 - We will not live in the type of community described in scripture unless we learn from scripture what are the integral components, how to share them, and why we need this.
 - We will not serve adequately unless we learn from scripture what it means to love the way Christ loves us and how to detect the ways God has equipped us for his planned good works.
 - We even will not learn from scripture adequately unless we learn from scripture itself the need and techniques of receiving instruction, reading and studying, memorizing, and reflecting.
- † Thus, it would be a disservice to leave a believer thinking that this growth process is fully automated. God plays the decisive role: without his sanctifying grace – his gift of growing us into his image – we would not change at all. Still, God has revealed his means of effecting this growth, and in every step of our cooperation in this process – at every decision about our attitudes and actions – God’s revealed Word in the Bible plays an essential role.
- You will not remain spiritually healthy, you will not grow spiritually, you will not become the person God designed you to be, you will miss out on many blessings God has in store for you, and you will sinfully fail to carry out the mission God has for you if you will not invest time in learning, understanding, and applying God’s Word.