

DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

MARCH 2024 | 2 TIM 3:15-17

"...from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."

2 Timothy 3:15-17, ESV

HEARTBURN HERMENEUTICS

If the most important question in life is: "Who has the last word?" (and it is), the next most important question is: "How do we hear it?" Christians know the value of the Bible. It is the written word of God, giving a divine account of history and recording the actions and words of God as He moves history toward His desired end. The apostle Paul told his spiritual son, Timothy: *"...from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work"* (2 Timothy 3:15-17, ESV). That is quite a remarkable promise! The Scriptures, when properly interpreted, can equip us in every thing we have been created to do as God's people on earth. However, the Bible also records that the

Scripture is lethal in the minds and hands of proud people.

The Lord over everything is Lord over the way we interpret Scripture. He determines how we are to view it, and He has laid out two primary requirements: 1) a humble heart and 2) a Christ-centered hermeneutic. The proud heart has not submitted to the Lord as the final word of God, and therefore it will twist Scripture to fit its own agenda. The Scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Only He can interpret it perfectly. The humble heart has received the Spirit of God as a gift and puts faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ. The same Spirit who inspired the writers of Scripture interprets it to readers as the living word of God, which has the power to bring resurrection-like transformation:

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom

of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”—

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

1 Corinthians 2:6-10, ESV

When humans try to understand God's word on their own and refuse to receive His revelation humbly, the Bible becomes something other than the life-giving word that empowers and enlightens the believer. The prophet Isaiah spoke of this to the disobedient Israelites of his day:

to whom he has said, “This is rest; give rest to the weary; and this is repose”; yet they would not hear. And the word of the Lord will be to them precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little, that

they may go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.

Isaiah 28:12-13, ESV

When the Israelites refused to humbly receive the mercy God was offering, the word of the Lord became restrictive, pedantic, litigious, mundane, boring, and death-dealing. It is the same today when people try to read the Bible without the gospel lens. Without the grace manifested in the gospel of Jesus, scriptures become a cruel schoolmaster. With the grace of divine illumination, however, we can see what otherwise is veiled to the human heart. The scales fall off when the Lord of Light appears. The apostle Paul's testimony is instructive as he tells about his trip to Damascus to jail some more followers of Jesus. He thinks he is seeing the scriptures accurately as he interprets them through the lens of Moses' era. When the light of the resurrected Jesus dawns upon him, he falls to the ground and hears a voice that changes his life forever. The One he had hated becomes his Lord. For a few days he was physically blind, but then Ananias prayed for him “and immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight” (Acts 9:18, ESV).

Later in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul explains why the unbelieving Jews are so hateful to the followers of Jesus: “Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed” (2 Corinthians 3:15-16, ESV).

God is eager for us to hear and see Him. Some are convinced that God is hard to hear and see. They conclude that they are disqualified because they are human or because they have failed in their attempts to be righteous. Instead of humbly admitting that we need His

forgiveness and graciously receiving His cleansing, we excuse our deafness and blindness and continue to long for truth and life. It is impossible for the proud heart but normal for the one who knows he or she needs grace. We all possess the arrogance that wants God to just give us the facts and the rules so that we can be the final word. We can decide what is best for us, taking God's word as one option. God does not open the eyes of the independent person trying to improve him or herself by applying selected tidbits of wisdom from God's Bible dispenser. He gives grace to the humble. Those same Israelites who refused God's grace and labored under a monotonous religion were told by Isaiah about God's desire and plan to restore the intimacy that Adam and Eve had lost in the Garden of Eden:

Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him... He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. As soon as he hears it, he answers you. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right and when you turn to the left. Then you will defile your carved idols overlaid with silver and your gold-plated metal images. You will scatter them as unclean things. You will say to them. "Be gone!"

Isaiah 30:18-22, ESV

It is God's desire for us to be enamored with the Teacher more than the lesson. He desires to enjoy our daily existence and be the source of our joy and purpose in living. He is wisdom and can be trusted to give us far more than we can dig up on our own. When the lesson to be learned is overshadowed by the Teacher who is with us, we will automatically throw away our idols. They will be exposed as the imposters they really are. If deep love of the Teacher is not there, getting rid of idols is a hard job that we never really get done. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my words." When we know we are loved by such a one as Jesus, we find a satisfaction that makes every substitute a hypocrite. It has to go.

The first thing Jesus did after His resurrection was to appear to two disciples walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. He hid His identity from their eyes at first. They thought He was a stranger asking questions about the previous weekend which had been devastating to them. They had believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah and that He would deliver Israelites from the oppression of the Romans. But their hopes had been dashed by the cruel Roman penal system aided by the testimony of blind religious Jewish leaders. Jesus had been crucified outside the city walls as a subversive criminal. They were totally disillusioned. Jesus began giving them a hermeneutics class. He started with Genesis and went through the whole Old Testament showing them how to read the Scriptures. I think it is significant that the first thing He did in the first days of the new creation was focus on Scripture and how to interpret it. The Lord of interpretation showed them how to apply Christo-centric interpretation to all Scripture. He showed them that the whole story in the Bible is about Him. Everything and everybody mentioned in the Bible gets its

significance in relationship to Him. All the players are important, but He alone is the subject of every story and the only one to be modeled. He is the seed of woman that crushes the head of the Serpent. He is the one predicted in the story of Noah and the flood. He would save a remnant that will begin a new creation. He is the Seed of Abraham that blesses the whole world. He is the ultimate Moses who delivers His people from bondage. He is the judge that delivers His people from the diverse groups trying to erase them from Canaan. He is the son of David who sits forever on the throne of God's rule on earth. He is the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the restoration from captivity. He is the restored temple, city, and land. All who came before Him in the story predicted Him. All after Him live on His merits and fulfill His mission. No wonder the disciples exclaimed, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24:32, ESV). "Heartburn" should be the normal result of reading the scriptures in this era of the new creation. The same One who inspired the writing is the same One the writing reveals and is the same One who lives in us to interpret it to us. The Teacher has come. He lives in us to reveal to us all that He has purchased for us. No wonder we live with a heartburn that moves us to do His works. Our obedience is not primarily duty, but delight. We have tasted the perfect righteousness of His fellowship. We cannot be satisfied by the offerings of religion or rebellion. We love the Scriptures because in them we meet again and again the Living Word that creates life in us. We see Him in our stead on the cross so that we can be in His stead at the right hand of the Father. We are His people in whom He delights, which delights us. Our temptations to chase self-glory are quelled by the vision of His majestic glory, and we find ourselves

joining the hosts of heaven bowing before the majestic vision saying, "Worthy! Worthy! Worthy is the Lamb." Our eyes are opened and our hearts burn with the passion of His love.

We are not left alone to find God or His will. The Lord of creation is also the Lord of communication, and He has done everything necessary to make Himself and His purpose known to us. We have His reflection in creation, His laws of order in our hearts as well as in writing. And finally we have full revelation in His Son who shows us what we could never get by observation or exploration. After His ascension, He and the Father sent the Spirit to us to make Him real in our daily lives. We are blessed. He opens eyes and ears. We can see the invisible, and hear the inaudible. We live now in the last days of the story of everything. We have heartburn and love it.



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