

## **“Give Attendance to Reading”**

It's that time of year when many men and women express their intentions to read the Bible from cover to cover before the next year arrives. Nothing is more important than building one's spiritual muscle. Since faith comes via the Word of God (Romans 10:17), the way to develop this fortitude is to turn to the Bible. The Lord said, "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11). God's Word is powerful (Romans 1:16). It can change lives. All who determine to spend time in God's Word are to be commended.

Is it enough just to read the Bible though? Jesus said to the Jews, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." (John 5:39). They had read the law of Moses for years and yet they could not or would not see that Jesus was the fulfillment of those Old Testament prophecies. They read God's Word, but they did not understand it or obey it.

Paul wrote to Timothy, "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." (I Timothy 4:13). The definition of the word "attendance" used here is "to bring to, bring near, to turn the mind to, to apply one's self to." It's obvious that Paul was urging an intense effort on Timothy's part in the study of God's Word. A mere glance at each verse was not sufficient. Timothy was to focus on every word for, as Jesus quoted when He met face to face with Satan, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4).

Psalms 119 contains many verses that show the need to go beyond a mere reading of the Word of God. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." (verse 11). "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day." (verse 97). "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (verse 103). "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (verse 105). David was not a casual reader of God's Word. He was a student of it. As such, he meditated upon it and applied it to his life.

One of the more impressive examples of sincere and diligent reading of God's Word is found in the time of Josiah, king of Judah. Apparently the written Word had been neglected to the point that it had been tucked away out of the sight of the inhabitants of Judah. In the midst of the restoration of the temple, which itself had been sorely neglected, Hilkiah the high priest said to the scribe, Shaphan, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord." (II Kings 22:8). The remainder of the verse says that "Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it." Now watch the verses that follow.

"And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again, and said, Thy servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, that have the oversight of the house of the Lord. And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes." (II Kings 22:9-11).

Reading on from verse 12 and into II Kings 23, we find that a marvelous transformation occurred in the kingdom of Judah, a transformation from sin to righteousness, all brought about by reading and following the Word of God. The book that God inspired led to conviction and change in the hearts of those who did not just read it, but studied it and obeyed it. The attitude associated with this type of reading is clearly expressed in the Chronicles account of these events.

"And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, great and small: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the Lord. And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book. And he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of

Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all that were present in Israel to serve, even to serve the Lord their God. And all his days they departed not from following the Lord, the God of their fathers.” (II Chronicles 34:30-33).

God did not give us His Word as a tool for our entertainment or amusement. The Bible is the Word of God, each syllable having been given by God to mankind through His inspired writers (I Corinthians 2:12-13). It is “quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12).

Yes, let’s read the Bible through this year, but let’s not be in such a rush that we forget to stop and let those inspired words sink into our hearts. Let us read God’s Word daily, not just for the sake of having read it, but for the sake of our eternal souls (II Timothy 2:15).

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