

13. The Word of God Endures

Biblical material: Mic. 6:8, John 3:14-17, 10:10, Rom. 4:21, Eph. 2:8, Phil. 4:7, 2 Pet. 3:9.

Quotes

- To the Bible men will return; and why? Because they cannot do without it. *Matthew Arnold*
- If we would destroy the Christian religion, we must first of all destroy man's belief in the Bible. *Voltaire*
- A single line in the Bible has consoled me more than all the books I ever read besides. *Immanuel Kant*
- The books of men have their day and grow obsolete. God's Word is like Himself, "the same yesterday, today and forever." *Robert Payne Smith*

Questions

If the Word of God is so enduring why are so many people ignorant of the Bible? What sets the Bible apart from other ancient writings? How would you point to the enduring relevance of the Bible to those who have no idea of what the Bible says? Why was/is the Bible necessary, especially from the point of view of the great controversy? Will we still need Bibles in heaven?

Discussion/ Comment

As we come to the end of this quarter on the Bible, what conclusions do we draw? We may say that the Bible "is a good thing." We may conclude it is reliable and helpful. But as we have previously noted, unless it makes a difference in the way we think and live, it is all pointless. That the Word of God endures is surely significant, but of far greater importance is the way we use the Bible and how its lessons impact who we are.

Is it really true, as Matthew Arnold observed, that we cannot do without the Bible? Often our lives seem to say that we are quite prepared to do without it. At this point we may be tempted to make some renewed commitment to Bible study. All well and good. But rather like New Year's resolutions, such a commitment may not last past January. Bible reading plans can be helpful. The idea of reading a chapter a day may work. Devotional guides have their part. But unless we see that the Bible is *essential* to us then these will only be devices to try and force us to read the Bible. Instead of all such programs, would it not be better to ask what questions most concern you and start looking in the Bible for answers—or even more questions? As John Newton observed, "Only God is permanently interesting," and the Bible helps us to discover God. Even perceived problem issues can be a place to start, for at least we know we are genuinely interested in them. Hopefully these are more than side-issues, but more important aspects of how we understand God's character.

For example, a small issue that makes you wonder about God. The pastor last Sabbath preached on Matthew's account of Jesus' cursing of the fig tree. He developed the theme that when Jesus approached he saw a lot of leaves, but no figs. He was hungry. So he commanded that the fig tree never should ever bear fruit again, and it withered, to the amazement of his disciples.

His conclusion was that even though we develop a lot of showy foliage, if we do not bear fruit, then we are unworthy and unproductive, and that we are liable to wither away if God should come looking for fruit. A sermonic illustration, certainly. But my wandering mind took

me over to the parallel passage in Mark. Mark tells the same account, and maybe Matthew was using that. But Matthew omits a rather significant observation that Mark made. He tells us that when Jesus went looking for figs, he found none, *because it was not the season for figs!* Now that changes the perspective some. It's hardly surprising not to find figs when it's not the time for figs to even be there. So what does this say about God and his intent towards us? That he expects the impossible? That God has unreasonable demands? That we should be producing fruit even out of season? A minor story, perhaps, but with some intriguing issues revealed. There are plenty of questions in the Bible, and what we should do is not simply to read, but to think and search for understanding. For ultimately it is through knowing and trusting the God of the Bible that we can accept his gracious love and look forward to an eternity with him.

Text comments

What is good, and what does God require? He replies, "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8 NIV). An interesting set of "requirements," which are far more relational than observance-based. Similarly, to those who would wish to establish a mechanical, rule-based system, Jesus himself points to the true reasons that are based in the character of the God of love (John 3:14-17). Consequently this means that condemnation—whether self-imposed or by others—no longer applies! The God of promise can deliver (Romans 4:21); it is his gracious gift that saves us, as we trust in him (Ephesians 2:8). God's peace guards us, as we place ourselves completely with him, identifying with his ways and principles (Philippians 4:7), for he desires everyone to come to him and be changed so they can truly be salvation-healed (2 Peter 3:9).

Ellen White Comments

Our Sabbath schools are nothing less than Bible societies, and in the sacred work of teaching the truths of God's word, they can accomplish far more than they have hitherto accomplished. The Sabbath school, when rightly managed, possesses marvelous power, and is adapted to doing a great work, but it is not now [1889] what it may and should be. {TSS 29}

Conversational Bible Study: Dialogue between Ellen White and her son W.C. White...

Elder White: "I have heard you say, Mother, that we should have more teaching and less preaching; less preaching and more teaching. Speaking of the matter of getting the people together and having Bible readings."

Ellen White: "That was the way in Christ's day. He would speak to the people, and they would call out a question as to what that meant. He was a teacher of the people."

Elder White: "Then at one time I remember very distinctly about your saying that, 'as we approach nearer the end I have seen our camp meetings with less preaching and more Bible study; little groups all over the ground with their Bibles in their hands, and different ones leading out in a free, conversational study of the Scriptures.'"

Ellen White: "That is the work that has been shown me, that our camp meetings would increase in success and interest. There are those that want more definite light. There are some that take [a] longer time to get hold of things and get what you really mean. If they could have the privilege of having it made a little plainer they would see that, and would catch hold of that. And it would be like a nail fastened in a sure place, and it would be written on the tablets of their hearts." {VSS 234-5}