

CCH 2nd Feb 2020 Why the Bible #4: Use of the Bible

Reading: 1 Tim 4:11-16. Let me read v13 again.

If you've travelled with us on this little journey over the last few weeks, you'll know that we have been answering four important questions about the Bible. They are all compressed into this question here:

"Why should I let my life be dictated by a weird, often misused book, written by people from so long ago?"

Atheist writer Christopher Hitchens has written a book called "God is not great" and he likens God to a cosmic dictator in the sky who is round the clock watching, controlling and supervising you from the moment of your conception to the moment of your death. He says that being a Christian "would be like living in North Korea"¹.

Well why would anyone want a God like that, and why would anyone therefore want their life to be "dictated" (to use the word from our question by this God and his book).

Week 1 we looked at the **character** of the Bible in general terms, and we saw that though there are parts that are culturally strange to us, it's a wonderful book because it's a personal book that points us to Jesus and speaks to us so relevantly. (So it's more "wonderful" than "weird").

Week 2 We look at **who wrote it**. Dead Jewish males from so long ago? Well yes, but actually a kind God superintending every word they wrote to say what he wants, so that the Bible is "breathed out" by Him, and therefore has the rightful authority to direct our lives.

Last week. We looked at **interpreting** the Bible. Can't you just make the Bible say what you want? Well not if you read it carefully and prayerfully, being sensitive to the kind of literature it is, the use of the words in the book, and the original setting of the first readers. We mustn't *twist* or *distort* Scripture to make it say what we want. So it can be misused, but it shouldn't be.

Bearing those things in mind as we approach how we practically use the Bible, already we are hopefully feeling less like God is a dictator. He's a loving Father, a good God, who has given us a wonderful book spoken by him.

But Christians do believe that God has shown us that Jesus is Lord, and that the place where he leads his flock is in the Bible. So we *do* want the Bible to **direct** our lives, to use a better "**d**", because we believe that a good and loving God who cares for us is showing us the best way to live. It won't be the easiest way to live, it won't be the most popular way to live, but it will be the best way to live because if Jesus loves us so much that he laid down his life for us, then why wouldn't we trust him to tell us how to live?

As we saw in Psalms 19 earlier, the word refreshes *the soul* and *makes the wise simple* and gives light *to the eyes*. It's described like pure gold and sweetest honey. Why wouldn't you read it?! It does us such good!

It's so precious! It's God's love letter to us (see picture)! So I want us today (big summary) to **REMEMBER THE PRECIOUS PRIORITY OF THE BIBLE**. And we will look at 3 verses to help us practically in 3 areas.

Let's start with 1) SUNDAY SERMONS.

And we turn to the reading which Becca read for us. We met Timothy briefly last time, a young pastor in Ephesus who is looking after God's flock there. And in these "pastoral epistles" as they are called, we see Paul advise him (and another pastor, Titus), on how to do their jobs.

These are crucial books which tell us what a church minister should be doing. So they are very relevant for me, and very relevant for what you should be looking for in a church. And this little section (1 Tim 4:13) is incredibly precious because it tells us about the priority of the Scriptures in the church gathering... "*Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching*". Read this verse in context and you'll see that it forms the key priority for Timothy.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPD1YGghtDk>

There are so many things that I could do with my limited time in the week, so many good things. But the pastoral epistles encourage me (2 Tim 4:2) to “preach the Word”. It’s why I normally try to set aside 4 mornings a week to work on my sermons, seeking to understand it rightly, and preparing to explain it clearly.

It’s why I try to delegate as much admin as I can, not answer emails in the morning, say no to all sorts of other good things I could be doing to make sure that like they did in Acts 6:4, I’m giving my “attention to prayer and the ministry of the word”. It can be a battle, and most Friday nights, I’m still up late trying to finish everything off before my day off.

It’s not a very glamorous image, but if the church is like a body, then a preacher is like the stomach, chewing over the Scriptures and helping us to digest it, helping us to see how the precious nutrients help each of us to grow and function properly. What you need is a pastor who is going to pray for you, and tell you straight what the Bible says whether you like it or not. If you are not a Christian you need the Bible to make you wise for salvation, if you are a new Christian you need the Bible to make you strong, and if you are the most mature Christian in Huntingdon, you still need the Bible to keep you on the straight and narrow.

And so in the 1 ¼ hours that we have to meet together, we could do so many things that would be good, and in fact encouraging and edifying. Stories, testimonies, videos. And actually we are having all of those briefly today. But the good can be the enemy of the best, if we are ignoring or downplaying the one main thing we should be doing, and that is the reading and teaching of the Bible. The Bible reading and its explanation in the sermon has to be central. **We want to stick with Jesus, so we want to stick with the Bible!**

Our preachers will try and show how it’s relevant to your lives, and do the difficult job of making it accessible to all ages and stages, but you will need to do some work too- listening in, thinking about it, praying as we go.

I enjoyed that rap² that we listened to – it’s on the dig deeper sheet on the way out and on the website if you want to listen to it in full. It’s about “expository preaching”- that is preaching the Bible in its original context- letting it speak for itself, reading out the meaning, not reading into it what I want to say. Here’s a great phrase: *“As you listen, be discerning- what you have to determine: was the point of the passage the point of the sermon? If not this problem must be confronted today because he just used the Bible to say what he wanted to say”* .

Remember the precious priority of the Bible in church! (repeat after me!)

2) Let’s move onto using the Bible in SMALL GROUPS.

When Paul talked about his ministry in Acts 20 (p1117) another lovely passage about the centrality of the Bible in ministry, well worth spending time in), he said 20:20 *“I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house”*. His ministry was public and private. Here at CCH as well as our Sunday gatherings we have 6 small groups where people can get together and look at the Bible. Talk to me about joining one if you aren’t in one already.

Maybe you are too busy. But remember the precious priority of the Bible. It will do you such good and you will grow!

Maybe you are worried about whether you’ll say the right thing. Don’t worry- it’s not a test. It’s more like enjoying an amazing cake together!

Maybe you don’t feel you are very academic, don’t let that stop you coming either. Bible study doesn’t need to be academic, perhaps you coming along will help keep it practical- perhaps there’s a group out there that actually needs your help so that it’s less academic, and more practical. Bible Study is for everyone, not just academic people, thank the Lord!

Maybe for whatever reason you find it hard to get out, or you are afraid of getting it wrong, or asking a silly question, or looking stupid. Can I say, don’t let any of these things stop you going. Satan wants to stop you!

Remember the precious priority of the Bible!

² Expository Preaching- Shai Linne <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWjemvijgG>

And let's make sure when we do meet, that we remember the priority of the Word. There's a place for catching up - we normally start with a meal in ours. There's a place for getting all the latest news. We have loads of banter and great cakes.

But we need to watch the clock, and not dawdle so that we get on with the reading and studying of the Bible. And we want to organise our small groups us to learn from the Bible. What it's saying to the original readers, what it means to us today in our lives.

If you can't get to a group, let's think about another way of helping you. One to one on the phone or skype, or in a coffee shop. I meet with someone every Monday morning to read the book of Revelation because he can't get to an evening group. We don't understand it all, we have lots of questions, but it's really encouraging and has helped us both to keep going in our faith, especially when life is hard, as it was for the first readers of the book.

I'll say more next week at the Annual Church Meeting, but I want **encouragement** to be a particular emphasis of 2020. And a key part of encouraging one another is with the Bible.

Life can be discouraging. Life can be hard. But what an encouragement to send people a bible verse and make sure you pray for them, or have someone over for a cup of tea, and reading a brief story about Jesus together and praying together.

Not adding to the Bible. The Bible is sufficient. That means it's enough- we see that in a verse we looked at in week 2. "Thoroughly equipped for every good work". Our advice to a group member or friend shouldn't be adding overly prescriptive advice to the Bible, as if we are placing a burden on someone beyond what the Bible is saying. Most of the time, we will just need a reminder of how good God is, and what Jesus has done.

But small group or one to one bible study or counsel can be really helpful for applying the Bible carefully to one another's lives. Remember the precious priority of the Bible in small groups.

Finally let's look at...**3) READING THE BIBLE ON OUR OWN**

Remember the precious priority of the Bible on your own!

Let's turn to our last verse Psalm 1:1-2 ([p543](#)). It's the gateway to the Psalms, and it speaks perfectly of Jesus. The man who never walked in the way of the wicked. Why not? He delighted in the law of the Lord.

And with his Spirit to help us, we can do the same. We can think about the Bible. We can read it and delight in it every day.

Now it's interesting. While the Bible tells us to encourage one another daily, and to rejoice always, it doesn't actually make it a rule for us to read the Bible every day.

And that's because the thing about reading the Bible is that it's about a relationship with Jesus and not a ritual. The Bible emphasises the goodness and the joy of the Bible, not brownie points to get us to heaven if you do it every day.

Nevertheless, many Christians find it a useful habit, to set aside a little bit of time regularly (perhaps first thing) to read a bit of the Bible. What is sometimes called a "Quiet Time".

Colin will be at the desk with a whole load of Bible resources to get you started or restarted on reading the Bible. I don't know how we can live without it.

Walk past most houses in Huntingdon and you'll see a massive TV screen flickering away *preaching* at the people. I use that term deliberately.

If we are not letting the Bible talk to us, preach to us, rewire our thinking, then it will be the BBC or Netflix or Amazon Prime preaching at us.

We won't stand a chance of thinking God's ways if we don't **remember the precious priority of the Bible!**

I'm not saying don't watch telly. I'm saying think about what you fill your head with. Mental junk food? How about filling your head with gold, much pure gold. Sweeter than Honey from the honeycomb.

Have you read the book of Nehemiah? It's really exciting. We're going to start it next Sunday- why not read ahead. Have you read the book of Obadiah? What are you going to say when you meet him in heaven and he says did you read my book?! Have you discovered a Psalm that speaks right into your situation-whether it be darkness, joy or difficulty? Have you seen Jesus in the gospels answering the pharisees with such wisdom.

It's a joy to read the Word. It's not always easy. You can get into a rut. You can feel far from God, and it becomes a bit of a duty. But wait on the Lord and he will refresh you.

There was a German dude in Bristol in the 1800s called [George Muller](#). He set up a lot of orphanages and schools, and he "lived by faith", trusting God in prayer to provide the money that was needed. He once wrote this about daily Bible reading, and note how he talks about making himself happy in the Lord...

I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not, how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man may be nourished.

I saw, that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov'd, instructed; and that thus, whilst meditating, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord. [\[Source: The Life of Trust\]](#).

There's some quaint language there, but he's saying the Bible brought him into personal communion with God, and he wouldn't do anything else until he was happy in God. He looks a happy man in that photo!

Read the Bible on your own. It's so precious. It's such a priority. It will do you such good. It will make you happy. Speaking of the commands of the Lord in Psalm 19 David says "they are more precious than gold than much pure gold".

Remember the precious priority of the Bible (church, group, self)!

A great quote to finish our series with. At the Queen's Coronation nearly 67 years ago, she was handed a Bible along with her crown jewels. Here's what the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland said to her as they handed her a Bible:

*'To keep your Majesty ever mindful of the Law and Gospel of God as the Rule for the whole life and government of Christian Princes, we present you with this Book, **the most valuable thing that this world affords**. Here is wisdom, this is the royal law, these are the lively oracles of God.'*

Let's pray.