

THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY (PART III)

Not everyone is able to understand the Scriptures. One must be born again. "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Corinthians 2:14). A person with a dead spirit is incapable of receiving the spiritual message of the Bible, He may be able to comprehend the words, dissect the arguments, appreciate the poetry, see the historical significance, and observe the archaeological proofs. He may even recognize the accuracy of the Bible when it touches on issues of science. Without the new birth, however, no one is capable of discerning the truth of the Spirit. Others, because of their lack of faith, do not accept the Bible as inspired and they will never understand its message because of their unbelief. The Bible is a spiritual book for spiritual people.

Sometimes Christians are resistant to the light, and this results in an inability to receive further light. When we are disobedient to what we know of the Word, the Holy Spirit is not able to penetrate our spirit to reveal more truth. Jesus said, "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear. Then He said to them, Take heed what you do hear. With the same measure you use it, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given" (Mark 4:23-24). Paul told the Corinthians, "And I brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal..." (I Corinthians 3:1-3). Christians are unable to comprehend the Bible message as long as they are in an unspiritual state.

Unfortunately carnal Christians perpetuate their condition by not studying the Bible which is what is necessary to bring them to a place where they can move ahead in their spiritual growth. Personal Bible study through the leading of the Holy Spirit is essential if one is to reach maturity in Christ. Milk is necessary for new-born infants, but milk will not produce growth and health in adults. That is the reason Peter said, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby: (I Peter 2:2). The writer of Hebrews rebuked believers who were stuck in their spiritual infancy. "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles (ABC's) of the oracles of God; and you come to need milk and not solid food" (Hebrews 5:12).

In review, we can say that studying the Word of God is a heart matter. Without the proper condition of heart it is impossible to be effective students of the Bible. T. Norton Sterrett gives five conditions of the heart that are necessary to understand the Scriptures: (1) A new heart (I Corinthians 2:14). One must be born into the family of God and possess the Holy spirit. (2) A hungry heart (I Peter 2:2). Bible knowledge does not come through casual interest and occasional reading. It is like searching for gold or buried treasures. You can only find it if you are willing to dig deep and devote your life to the pursuit of God through His Word. (3) An obedient heart (Psalm 119:98-100). To understand God's Word requires more than analysis. It requires response to what God shows us. (4) A disciplined heart (Matthew 7:7). Many people start studying the Bible, then quit. Jesus said, "Seek and you shall find...Bible study is hard work and requires perseverance. (5) A teachable heart (Isaiah 50:4). We must be willing to lay aside our own preconceptions and admit when we are wrong. That requires humility. The humble, teachable heart is the one to whom God will show His truth.