

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Living as Christians in a Secular World through Bible Study”
(Part I of “Christian Living in a Secular Society”)
October 19, 2025

Scripture

Psalm 119:105
2 Timothy 3:15-17

Core Idea and purpose

Core ideas from earlier sermons in the series:

- None yet. This is the first sermon in a series.

Core Idea: Going deep into God’s written word sets us apart from secular society

Challenge/purpose: To encourage the congregation to systematically & prayerfully study Scripture

The Sermon

We live in an increasingly secular society. This means that the number of people who may be spiritual but religiously unaffiliated is increasing. We call these wonderful seekers the nones, because they are not associated with any organized religion. In North America there was a 92.3% increase of nones (religiously unaffiliated) from 2010 to 2020. It went from 59,340 to 114,130. In the United States, in 2010 16.5% of the population were nones and in 2020 it went up to 29.7%, an increase of 13.2%. ¹ So, we live in an increasingly secular society.

We may not like this. But there’s a few things we need to remember:

- First: Jesus promises that the church will continue. He says, “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the **gates of Hades will not overcome it**” (Matthew 16:18)
- Second: The church thrives when it has minority status. During its first 300 years of existence, the church was in a minority status and suffered periods of persecution. Yet, it grew. Congregations sprang up from western Europe all the way to India – the entire expanse of the Roman Empire. The church doesn’t need political or economic power to thrive, if we live faithfully.

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Sermon Outline
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So, what we, as followers of Jesus, need to do is live as faithful Christians in an increasingly secular world. When we do this, we stand out and become living witnesses for Christ. For the next few weeks, we will learn about how we live as Christians in a secular world so we can stand out and become living witnesses for Jesus.

Today, we talk about living as Christians in a secular world through Bible study. If we dig deep into the Written Word of God, we will stand out from the secular world. Let me say this again: If we dig deep into the Written Word of God, we will stand out from the secular world.

John Wesley, the leader of the 18th century Methodist revival, understood this. In the preface to his published sermons, he boldly proclaimed, “*Let me be homo unius libri.*” This is Latin, and it means, “Let me be a man of one book.” This was his way of saying that we can find everything we need to know about God and salvation in this one book, what we call the Bible. Wesley read many other theological books. He was one of the most well-read men of his time. But the reason he read so many theological books was so he can better understand the one book – the Bible.

At the conclusion of the American Revolution, when the former English colonies gained their independence, it became obvious that the Methodist in the new nation were not going to remain in the Church of England. So, John Wesley gave them his blessing to organize their own, separate denomination and sent them some ordained Methodist clergy with an abridged version of the Anglican Articles of Religion to help organize them. These are the same Articles of Religion found in the United Methodist Book of Discipline. Article V of the Articles of Religion is titled “Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation”. It says, “The Holy Scriptures containeth all things necessary to salvation...”.

The Bible has everything we need to know to have a restored, loving relationship with God because that is its purpose. We see this purpose in 2 Timothy 3:15-17. This passage is part of a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to a young, inexperienced pastor named Timothy. Paul was emphasizing the importance of sound doctrine, especially as it relates to the Written Word of God. It says....

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
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Now, let's break this down.

...from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Here's the overarching purpose of Scripture. The Holy Spirit uses Scripture to teach us about salvation through faith in Jesus.

You may have noticed that I like to refer to the Bible as the 'Written Word of God' rather than 'The Word of God'. Jesus is THE WORD of GOD as stated in John 1:1 and 16, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...The Word became flesh." The Holy Spirit uses the Written Word of God to bring us to THE WORD of GOD, Jesus the Christ.

All Scripture is God-breathed.

The Bible is a holy book because God worked with the human authors to create it. For this reason, God can use the Bible to speak to us and change our hearts.

and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

God uses the Bible to teach us what it means to be righteous and holy.

Finally, *so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Through the Bible, God empowers us to be His hands, arms, and feet on earth. In other words, through the Bible, God empowers us to make the Kingdom of God more of a reality on earth. This is how we prepare for the 2nd coming of Jesus.

To sum it up, we can say that, according to 2 Timothy 3:15-17, the Holy Spirit uses the Bible to 1) Bring us into a relationship with the Father through faith in Jesus, 2) Make us more holy & loving like Jesus, and 3) Speak to us.

This is why we will stand out from the secular world if we dig deep into the Written Word of God. As the Holy Spirit changes us through Bible study, we will love the hard to love and that will make us stand out from the secular world. As the Holy Spirit changes us through Bible study, we will love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, and that will make us stand out from the secular world? And, as the Holy Spirit changes us through Bible study, we will stand up to oppression by turning the other cheek and going the extra mile and that will make us stand out from the secular world.

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
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During the days of the Roman Empire, when plagues devastated villages, towns, and cities, most people would leave the infected area to save themselves. Christians, however, would stay in the infected area to care for the suffering and dying.² They did this because Leviticus 19:18 told them to love their neighbors as they love themselves and Leviticus 19:34 explained, “The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born.” They also took seriously what Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” So, no wonder they risked their lives to care for others during the plagues. Did that make them stand out from the secular world? You bet it did!

Notice that 2 Timothy 3:15-17 says nothing about being a science book. Do not force the Bible to be something God never intended it to be. For example, Genesis tells us a story about creation. In this story, God created the heavens and the earth in 6 days. Science, however, says that creation took several thousand years. Does science disprove the Bible? No, not at all, because the Bible does not teach science. As your pastor, I do not care if you believe God created the world in 6 days or 6 million years! But I do care that you receive the theological message that God gives us through Genesis, which is 1) God created everything and it was good, 2) we screwed it all up, and 3) God is fixing it. That is what we need to learn from Genesis, not the length of time it took God to create the world.

So, we need to prayerfully and deeply read the Bible. When we do so, God will speak to us. To receive God’s messages through Bible study, there are two practices we must do.

The first practice is to read the Written Word of God through the lens of Jesus. Remember, Jesus is fully human and fully God. So, whenever we read a Bible passage, we ask, “How would Jesus react to this passage? What would Jesus want us to learn from this passage?”

This is very helpful when we read the Bible passages that seem to promote violence. For example, Judges 19-20 tells a bloody story about a husband who sends his wife outside so that a mob of men can rape her instead of him. The next morning, the man finds his wife dead, cuts her body into 12 pieces and sends the pieces to the 12 tribes of Israel. This prompts a civil war that causes the near extermination of one of the tribes.

² [Christian Mercy in a Time of Plague - Credo Magazine; www.earlychristians.org/-did-the-early-christians-face-epidemics-and-illnesses/](http://www.earlychristians.org/-did-the-early-christians-face-epidemics-and-illnesses/)

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When we look at this bloody, evil story through the eyes of Jesus and ask, “What would Jesus want us to learn from this?”, the first thing we conclude is that this story is not a justification for violence and oppression. Looking at a Bible story through the eyes of Jesus will never lead us to conclude that we can use the story as justification for violence and oppression. After all, Jesus is the Prince of Peace who tells us to love our enemies. So, we develop empathy for all the characters and look at the story from each person’s perspective. In this way, we glean sound moral lessons from the story that is congruent with the wisdom of Jesus.

The second practice is to look for the threads that run through the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. When we read the entire Bible, we notice some threads that connect all the books of the Bible and makes it one story. Some of these threads include God’s sovereignty and righteousness. The two threads that I tend to focus on are love and justice. These threads begin with Genesis 1 & 2. When God created the earth, there were perfectly loving relationships – between humanity and God, between humanity and creation, and between humanity and humanity. Perfect love and justice reigned throughout creation. Revelation ends with a new heaven and earth that is once again full of love and justice. In between Genesis and Revelation, we learn that God is restoring perfect love and justice in creation. Therefore, when we interpret a Bible passage, we are to do so in a way that promotes love and justice.

Later today, we will remember our baptism. Remembering our baptism reminds us that we are children of God. As such, we are to dig deeply into the Written Word of God so we can stand out from secular society and become living witnesses for Christ.

How much of the Bible are you reading? If you would like encouragement in your personal Bible study, join me on Mondays at 7PM or consider starting your own Bible study circle.

Let’s pray.

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- I. Introduction: We live in an increasingly secular society.
- A. In North America there was a 92.3% increase of nones (religiously unaffiliated) from 2010 to 2020.
- It went from 59,340 to 114,130.
- B. In the United States:
- In 2010 16.5% of the population were nones
 - In 2020 it went up to 29.7%, an increase of 13.2%. ³
- C. So, we live in an increasingly secular society.
- D. We may not like this. But there’s a few things we need to remember:
- First: Jesus promises that the church will continue.
 - He says, “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the **gates of Hades will not overcome it**” (Matthew 16:18)
 - Second: The church thrives when it has minority status.
 - During its first 300 years of existence, the church was in a minority status and suffered periods of persecution.
 - Yet, it grew.
 - Congregations sprang up from western Europe all the way to India – the entire expanse of the Roman Empire.
 - The church doesn’t need political or economic power to thrive, if we live faithfully.
- E. So, what we, as followers of Jesus, need to do is live as faithful Christians in a secular world.
- When we do this, we stand out and become living witnesses for Christ.

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Sermon Outline
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- For the next few weeks, we will learn about how we live as Christians in a secular world so we can stand out and become living witnesses for Jesus.
- II. Today, we talk about living as Christians in a secular world through Bible study.
- A. If we dig deep into the Written Word of God, we will stand out from the secular world.
- Let me say this again: If we dig deep into the Written Word of God, we will stand out from the secular world.
- B. John Wesley, the leader of the 18th century Methodist revival, understood this.
- In the preface to his published sermons, he boldly proclaimed, “*Let me be homo unius libri.*”
 - This is Latin, and it means, “Let me be a man of one book.”
 - This was his way of saying that we can find everything we need to know about God and salvation in this one book, what we call the Bible.
 - Wesley read many other theological books.
 - He was one of the most well-read men of his time.
 - But the reason he read so many theological books was so he can better understand the one book – the Bible.
- C. At the conclusion of the American Revolution, when the former English colonies gained their independence, it became obvious that the Methodist in North America were not going to remain in the Church of England.
- So, John Wesley gave them his blessing to organize their own, separate denomination and sent them some ordained Methodist clergy with an abridged version of the Anglican Articles of Religion to help organize them.
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Sermon Outline
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- Article V of the Articles of Religion is titled “Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation”.
- It says, “The Holy Scriptures containeth all things necessary to salvation...”.

III. The Bible has everything we need to know to have a restored, loving relationship with God because that is its purpose.

A. We see this purpose in 2 Timothy 3:15-17.

- This passage is part of a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to a young, inexperienced pastor named Timothy.
- Paul was emphasizing the importance of sound doctrine, especially as it relates to the Written Word of God.
- It says....*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

B. Now, let's break this (2 Timothy 3:15-17) down.

- ...*from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*
 - Here's the overarching purpose of Scripture right here.
 - The Holy Spirit uses Scripture to teach us about salvation through faith in Jesus.
 - You may have noticed that I like to refer to the Bible as the 'Written Word of God' rather than 'The Word of God'.
 - Jesus is THE WORD of God as stated in John 1:1 and 16, “In the beginning was the Word, and the

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- The Holy Spirit uses the Written Word of God to bring us to THE WORD of GOD, Jesus the Christ.
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Bible study is one way we live as Christians in a secular. If we dig deep into the Written Word of God, we will stand out from secular society. How much of the Bible are you reading? If you would like encouragement in your personal Bible study, join me on Mondays at 7PM or consider starting your own Bible study circle.

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