

02 – THE BIG PICTURE

- ✓ Last week, we looked at two ways that we can get the most out of the Word: (1) Have a High Opinion of the Word; and (2) Realize that there are Benefits to Putting the Word First Place. Here's number three. You get the most out of the Word when you ...

3. Understand How Its Put Together

Isaiah 28:10 – “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line; **here a little and there a little.**”

- ✓ I've often said: If I had written the Bible, it would look completely different than the one you're holding. In my Bible, each Book would contain one topic. There would be the “Book of Salvation”, the “Book of Marriage”, the “Book of Healing”, the “Book of Money”, and so on. It would be written in topics.
- ✓ But that's not how God put it together! Instead, He took the information on each subject and spread it throughout 66 books ... like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. (“Here a little and there a little.”) It's *our* job to find the pieces and assemble them into something useful. **When we put them together correctly, we see the full picture, and understand what the Bible teaches on the subject.** (There are a few things we can learn from this “jigsaw puzzle” illustration.)
- (a) It's Easier to Put the Pieces Together, When You've Seen the Picture on the Box.
- ✓ When my wife does a jigsaw puzzle, she finds it helpful to keep the cover of the box nearby. (She keeps going back to that picture as she works on the puzzle.) In Bible study, interpreting individual verses becomes easier when you understand the overall Message of the Bible. The Bible's overall Message is “the picture on the box”. Individual passages are interpreted in the light of the larger Message.
- (b) If You Want the Puzzle to Look Right When You're Finished, You Need to Have All the Pieces.

- ✓ Imagine you're working on a 1000-piece puzzle, but unbeknownst to you, 63 of the pieces are missing. If that's the case, you'll probably spend hours searching for pieces that no longer exist! Not only is that going to be frustrating, but it's also going to affect the final appearance of the puzzle.
- ✓ Now let's apply that to Bible Study. If you're studying the Bible on a particular subject, you're going to have to *locate* and *consider* as many verses as possible on that subject. For example, if you're trying to understand what the Bible says about money, looking at 20 or 30 verses isn't going to be all that helpful. (There are 2,350 verses on money. If you limit your study to 10% of them, then you're going to have a very incomplete picture, at best.)
- ✓ (Side Thought) – That explains why there are so many differences of opinion in the body of Christ. If I read these 30 verses on healing, and you read a different 30 verses, it's going to be very easy to come to different conclusions.
- ✓ When you *start* your study, you may not have identified all the verses yet. (“Here a little, and there a little” implies a process of gathering.) Start with what you have, while you continue the search for more. Once you've found all the verses you can, put them together, like the pieces of a puzzle. If you reach your conclusion, but one or two verses don't fit, then go back to the drawing board. When you have the truth, every piece fits.

The Place of Prayer

Isaiah 28:10 – “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line; **here a little and there a little.** **For with stammering lips and another tongue** will he speak to this people ... But the word of the Lord was unto them, precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little.”

- ✓ When he mentions “stammering lips and another tongue”, he's referring to praying in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:19-22).

- ✓ Did you notice the pattern? Read “line upon line”, gather the verses from “here and there” ... STOP AND PRAY IN TONGUES ... (if you can’t pray in tongues, then pray in English. The point isn’t the tongues, the point is that you connect with God) ... then go back to studying. That’s the pattern: “Read, pray, read. Study, pray, study.” It’s wise to commune with the Author of the Book, while you’re seeking to interpret it.

Three Primary Functions

- ✓ There are three things we need to do, as we approach the Word: Read, Study and Meditate. We need to learn how to do all of them.
- (i) Learn to Read – That almost sounds insulting, doesn’t it? (“Pastor Ron! How rude! Of *course*, I know how to read!”) I know you do! But I don’t read the Bible like I’d read the newspaper, or a novel. It takes an entirely different level of thought and attention when you’re reading God’s Word.
- ✓ Don’t Speed Read. We tend to fall into this trap when we set unrealistic goals for ourselves. (“I’m going to read 20 chapters a day.”) At that point, we feel the temptation to get through it as fast we possibly can. Therefore, we get very little out of it. But, **God would rather you read two verses and learn something, than have you read ten chapters and stay ignorant.**
- ✓ Your Level of Attention. One author suggests that we read the Bible like we’d read a love letter. He writes: “Have you ever fallen in love? Have you ever received a love letter? When you received it, did you mumble, ‘Oh, no, another letter from my girl/(boy)friend! I guess I should probably read it!’ Certainly not! Your hands were trembling as you opened the envelope! Once you got it opened, did you sit down, read the first two lines, and say, ‘Well, that’s enough for today! I can check *that* off my To Do list!’ No way! You carried it with you, pulled it out of your pocket and read it over and over! Why? You were in love with the person that wrote it!

Picture a young man who has just received his first love letter! He

may have already read it three or four times, but he’s just beginning. As he reads, he will ponder over the exact shade of meaning of every word! Did she refrain from saying, ‘Dear Bill’, because she was bashful? Or didn’t she *want* to say it? Maybe she would have said ‘Dear so-and-so’ to anybody! A worried frown now appears on his face! But it disappears as soon as he thinks about the first sentence! ‘She wouldn’t have written *that* to just anybody!’ And so, he works his way through the letter, one moment perched blissfully on a cloud, the next moment huddled miserably behind an eight-ball. It has started a hundred questions in his mind! He could quote it by heart! If fact – he will – for weeks to come. If we read the Bible with anything *like* the same concentration, we’d all be spiritual giants!”

- (ii) Learn to Study – We’re not encouraged just to “read” the Bible. Paul says, “STUDY to show yourself approved.” In this verse, he connects “studying” with “rightly interpreting” the Word. (In the survey we quoted last week, we found out that only 3% of Christians study the Word daily. I’m convinced that most Christians don’t study because they don’t know how to study. We want to teach you how.)
- (iii) Learn to Meditate – When we hear the word “meditate”, we tend to picture a Buddhist sitting cross-legged on the floor, chanting a mantra. But that’s not what the Bible means when it tells us to meditate (Ps. 119:99, Joshua 1:8, Ps. 1:2, etc.)
- ✓ One meaning of the word “meditate” is to visualize. Use your God-given sanctified imagination. Put yourself into the story. In the story of the woman with the issue of blood, *become* the woman. You’ve been sick for 12 years, and you’ve spent all your money trying to get well. The doctors couldn’t help. The things they *tried* just hurt you.

Then someone tells you of Jesus. Hope springs up in your heart. You know you’re not allowed in public, but you’ve *got* to try. (If you get stoned for going out of your house, what have you lost?) So, you set out – faith and hope surging through you. You look for Jesus for hours. Finally, you see Him, but there’s a crowd between you and the Healer. You’re not supposed to touch anyone, but you start pushing people out of the way. You touch the hem of His garment ...