

## **IT WILL NEVER BE URGENT TO OBEY GOD'S WORD 2 TIMOTHY 3:14-17**

W.C. Fields was one of the great comedians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was known for his sarcastic wit and irreverent behavior. It's been reported that a close friend found him reading the Bible a few days before his death. When Fields was asked why, he replied, "I'm looking for loopholes." Many people have the same attitude towards God's Word whether they read it or not. This morning I want to talk about why the Bible matters and how the Bible matters.

Here's a saying that has stayed with me: "The important is seldom urgent; the urgent is seldom important." It articulates an obvious truth. Many of the things in life that you consider very important never feel very urgent: for example, improving your marriage, spending time with your kids or giving up a bad personal habit. Important things have a way of never appearing very urgent. As a result, most of us don't devote the sort of time and energy that we should to those issues. Important? Yes! Urgent? Not very often. By the same token, many of the things that seem very urgent at one moment in time have little or no long term importance. It may be urgent today to select just the right kind of new computer, or plan just the right kind of vacation, or encourage your kid to pursue just the right sport, but are those issues truly important in the long run? Urgent? Sure! Important? Not so much. The fact is that most of us live out too much of our lives responding to the things that appear to be very urgent but lack long term importance. And because we neglect to pursue the truly important matters of life, we begin to sense that our lives lack depth and quality. You've no doubt heard the expression "the tyranny of the urgent." That can happen. You can live your life just lurching from one urgent moment, one urgent decision and one urgent issue to the next. As a result, you miss living for what's important.

This tension between the urgent and the important shows up most clearly in your spiritual life. Most of what God wants to do in your life is important but it rarely appears to be urgent. It's never urgent to trust Jesus as your personal Savior. Important? Of course! Urgent? Not until you allow the Holy Spirit to make it so. It's never urgent to become like Jesus in your character. Important? Sure! Urgent? Probably not lately. It's never urgent to find a church and get involved. Important? Yes! Urgent? It can wait another week, another month, another year. It's never urgent to start serving the Lord in some kind of ministry inside or outside the church. Important? To be sure! Urgent? Not so much.

Then there's the one I want to talk about today. I submit that it's never urgent to obey God's Word. Important? We give lip service to the importance of the Bible! But is it ever really urgent to obey what's in the Bible? Nope! And that's why a lot of the time we just don't get around to obeying God's Word. Some of us haven't even read enough of it to know what it is that we're supposed to obey! That's because it's not urgent to read the Bible either. Important? I guess so.... Urgent? Not when there's the sports page, or Facebook or the TV to interact with instead. Here are two bold statements to think about at the beginning of a

new year. First, the most successful people in life daily discern what's urgent and what's important and, most of the time, they choose the important. Second, the people who have the most successful relationship with God daily discern what's urgent and what's important and, more often than not, they choose the important. They don't allow themselves to be tyrannized by the urgent. Let's read what the Bible says about the Bible. The apostle Paul is writing to Timothy, his young colleague in ministry.

## **WHY DOES THE BIBLE MATTER?**

Paul answers that question in the passage we just read. The first reason is simply because the Bible is unique. Paul reminds Timothy that he's known the "holy scriptures", as he puts it, from his infancy. That word "holy" means to set something apart for God's use. Holy means something is unique or special. Not everybody believes the Bible is God's Word, but everyone has to admit that it's the most influential book ever written. Every year the Bible is the best selling book all over the world. It's been read by more people in more languages than any book ever written. If for no other reason than this, you should read the Bible from cover to cover – it's the most unique book ever written.

Other factors point to its uniqueness. The Bible is amazing in its diversity and unity. Consider its diversity. It was written over a period of some 1500 years by over 40 different authors. And they were a very diverse group: kings, poets, fishermen, statesmen, philosophers and just common men. The Bible was written in diverse places: in deserts, in prisons, in palaces, in caves, on islands, in times of war and in times of peace. It was written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. It deals with hundreds of subjects and yet there is a single unifying thread that runs through all 66 books of the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation, that unifying theme is this: God has a plan to save human beings through Jesus Christ. The passage we just read implies again this overarching purpose of the Bible when it says, "...they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus." (2 Tim 3:15 NLT)

What else makes the Bible unique? It's survived unparalleled persecution and criticism. The Bible has been banned, burned or outlawed in various places from the days of the Roman Empire right up to the present day. Few Christians appreciate the price that's been paid through the centuries to ensure that you can hold God's Word in your hands this morning. Men like John Wycliffe and William Tyndale suffered and died for making the Bible available in the English language. Thousands have been imprisoned, tortured or killed in just the last 100 years for either possessing or passing along a copy of the Bible. In addition, the Bible has survived centuries of attacks on it by scholars who have tried to cast doubts on its authenticity and trustworthiness.

Did you know that we don't possess any of the original manuscripts of any book of the Bible? Instead, we have copies of copies of copies. How can you be sure,

then, that you really have God's Word today? You can be surer of the original text of any book in the Bible than you can be sure of any other piece of ancient literature. Scholars tell us that you can have far more confidence in the accurate text of the Bible than even the actual writings of William Shakespeare less than 400 year ago. Voltaire was a French philosopher and atheist – an ardent enemy of the Christian faith. Before his death in 1778, he predicted that the Christian faith would die out in a hundred years after his death. Fast forward 50 years after Voltaire's death and you would have found that the Geneva Bible Society had bought Voltaire's house and his printing presses in Paris and was using them to make stacks of Bibles and selling them out of his home!

Here's another reason the Bible matters. It's God's Word. "All Scripture is God-breathed.... (2 Tim 3:16 NIV) What does that mean? When God created Adam, He breathed life into Adam and Adam got up and lived. In much the same way, God breathed His life into the words of prophets and the writing of apostles so that lifeless words became spiritually alive and effective. Paul didn't write like Moses and David didn't write like John; nevertheless, God used the unique style and abilities of each author to transmit faithfully, completely and truthfully the very thoughts and intents of God Himself for all time and eternity.

Why do we say the Bible is God's Word? It is revelation – the truth about God given by God Himself. It is inspired because the Holy Spirit influenced the different authors to write down exactly what God intended. When the Holy Spirit enables you to understand God's inspired revelation, we call it illumination. Did Jesus believe the Bible to be God's Word? Indeed, He did! Jesus said, "Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved." (Matt 5:17-18 NLT) Clearly Jesus believed that what the Bible says, God says. The Bible is God's Word.

Why else does the Bible matter? The Bible is useful. In the passage we read, it says that the Bible is useful for teaching. How else would you know anything reliable about God or about Jesus if it wasn't from the Bible? In addition, the Bible is chock full of positive and practical instruction on how to live. The Bible is useful for rebuking. It's no fun getting rebuked, but it's a necessary part of becoming the best possible person you can be. Mark Twain, the famous author, once remarked, "It's not the parts of the Bible I don't understand that bother me. It's the parts I do understand that give me fits." Here's what the Bible says about the Bible, "For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires." (Heb 4:12 NLT)

The Bible is useful for correcting. Where can you find truth in the midst of all the different theories out there about what's real, what's important, what's the meaning of life and who is God? Every theory can be evaluated and corrected

by comparing it to God's Word. The Bible is useful for training. Training for what? Righteousness, it says there. That means your relationship with God which will impact every other relationship in your life. Finally, the Bible is useful for equipping. "God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work." (2 Tim 3:17 NLT) In other words, the Bible will help you do the stuff that pleases God and blesses other people. The Bible's primary purpose isn't just to give you lots of data or even to satisfy your curiosity. Ultimately, the Bible was given to enable you to live to God and for God.

A TV program that aired just before the Winter Olympics some years ago featured blind skiers being trained for slalom skiing as impossible as that sounds. Paired with sighted skiers, these blind skiers were taught how to make right and left turns on the flats. When they'd mastered that, they were taken up to the slalom slope where their sighted partners skied beside them shouting "Left!" or "Right!" As they obeyed the commands, those blind skiers were able to negotiate the course and cross the finish line depending on the sighted skiers' word alone. It was either complete trust or catastrophe. In this world, you are in reality spiritually blind about most things. You must rely on the Word of the only One who can see all there is to know past, present and future – God Himself. His Word gives you direction and equips you to finish the course.

## **HOW DOES THE BIBLE MATTER?**

How do you express in everyday life and living that the Bible matters to you? First, you must learn the Bible. That means getting it into your head. I wish there were easier ways to learn God's Word! Wouldn't it be nice if you had a little trap door or a computer-like USB port so that you could just download an encyclopedic knowledge of the Bible directly into your brain? Learning the Bible is like getting a degree or learning a profession. It demands some personal effort and time on your part. It will never just happen all by itself or all at once.

Learning the Bible means you must read it. Read all of it. Now, it may be true that the genealogies in the Old Testament are not as important as, say, the Gospel of John. Nevertheless, you need to be thoroughly aware of all of the Bible because all of it is God's Word. Do you read the Bible regularly and systematically? Learning the Bible means you must study it. Study it on your own. Study it in groups. That's the primary purpose of our Bible classes on Sunday mornings and the small groups that meet during the week. You need to model the attitude and actions of the Old Testament leader, Ezra. The Bible says of him, "... Ezra had determined to study and obey the Law of the LORD...." (Ezra 7:10 NLT) If you think listening to me talk about the Bible once a week is all you need, you're on a spiritual starvation diet. Learning the Bible demands you study it which will lead you to be devoted to God because of it.

Bobby Griffin was a hell-raiser and a womanizer. One day he put his trust in Jesus as his Savior. Within a week of his conversion, he sought out a doctor.

The nurse asked him, "Have you been here before?" Bobby said, "No." "We will need some data on you. What is it that you want?" Bobby answered, "I want the doctor to flush out my mind." The nurse said, "What?" "I want him to flush out my mind. It's still dirty. I've become a Christian. I want the doctor to flush out my mind." "Sir," said the nurse, "the doctor doesn't do that." Bobby Griffin found out how to do it. He's on the road a lot. He listened to Christian tapes and CDs all the time. As he jogged every morning, he listened to God's Word. When he went back to his motel room and while he was getting dressed, he listened to God's Word. When he got into his car, he listened to God's Word. "Soon," said Bobby Griffin, "my mind began to become clean."

If you really want the Bible to matter in your everyday life, you must love the Bible. That's more about your heart than your head. The Devil himself is the most frightening example that knowledge of the Bible is never enough. When he tempted Jesus in the desert, it's clear that even the Devil knows the Bible very well. I daresay he knows the Bible better than you do, but he has no love for it. When you truly love the Bible, you accept it as the final authority in your life. The Bible is God's final authority whether or not you accept that fact personally. But if you love God and His Word, you will willingly come under its authority.

If you've been a follower of Jesus for very long, you hear people talk about "biblical authority." What does that mean? Even when I don't understand a Bible passage completely, I trust it and do what God has said. In the Old Testament there's a story about a man named Naaman, a powerful general who had the deadly disease of leprosy. He came to a prophet named Elisha for healing. Elisha told him to go and dunk himself in the Jordan River seven times. Naaman wasn't impressed with those instructions, but his servant convinced him to obey them, nevertheless. The result? He was completely healed of leprosy. You need to approach life with much the same attitude of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She was attending a wedding at a place Cana. That was where Jesus turned water into wine – his first recorded miracle. Do you remember what Mary said to the servants at the wedding about Jesus? "... 'Do whatever he tells you.'" (John 2:5 NLT) That's the right attitude and action when it comes to God's Word – even the parts that you don't fully understand. God doesn't ask anyone to "kiss his or her brain good-bye" when it comes to understanding and obeying His Word, but there will be times when you simply need to obey God and trust Him even without full understanding. Even when you don't understand, obey!

Biblical authority means that I realize I need the Bible as much as I need food. Do you really believe that? Just look back over this past week and figure out how much time you've spent feeding on God's Word. Again, some of you are on a spiritual starvation diet. Some of you are suffering from spiritual anorexia. You might resemble – spiritually speaking – those heartbreaking pictures of starving children in Africa. But here's the all important difference. Their physical starvation is not their choice. Your spiritual starvation is your choice. Their physical starvation is not self-inflicted. Your spiritual starvation is self-inflicted.

Biblical authority means that while I recognize and respect human opinion, the Bible is right on every subject. The Bible is not just one more opinion among many clamoring and shouting for my attention or acceptance. The Bible is the Word of God. It's the expression of God's will for every area of your life: marriage, work, parenting, sexuality, attitudes, money, success – everything! Accepting the authority of scripture over every area of your life is one of life's most profound and important decisions. Is the Bible your personal authority?

Finally, if you want the Bible to matter in your life, you must live the Bible. That deals with your hands and your feet! The Bible must be allowed to change and mold your attitudes and actions in your everyday life. Otherwise, it's just so much foolishness and self-deception to say you accept its authority in your life. When the Devil tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, he encouraged her to question God's truthfulness. "... 'Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?'" (Gen 3:1 NLT) Eve knew God's Word, but she disobeyed it. Contrast that with the Devil's encounter with Jesus in the desert. He quoted the Bible to Jesus! How did Jesus respond? "... 'No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone.'" (Luke 4:4 NLT) Jesus was quoting the Old Testament that says, "... 'people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.'" (Deut 8:3 NLT) Jesus also knew God's Word and He obeyed it. At the end of the day, if you obey God's Word in your everyday, walk around life, you obey God. Your attitude towards the Word of God is one and the same as your attitude towards God Himself. If you love God, you love His Word. If you obey God, you obey His Word. If you know God, you know His Word.

Pastor and author, Stuart Briscoe, recalls a conversation he had with a stewardess on an airplane. He was doing some work there with an open Bible in front of him. The stewardess came by and said to him, "You know, four years ago the Bible was a dead book to me. Then something happened. I can't explain it, but now I can't get enough of it. I devour it." Briscoe answered, "I know what happened. Have you ever read a book that was boring to you? Then one day you met the author. Afterwards, you picked up that same book and said, 'I know who wrote this' and it becomes the most interesting book in the world to you." "Yes, that's what happened to me," said the stewardess. "I met the author."

When you meet the Author of God's Word, He begins to write it on your heart instead of hitting you over the head with it. You begin to desire it rather than resent it. Let's face it. Reading and knowing God's Word will never be urgent. Obeying God's Word will never be urgent. But is it important? May God help you and me to drive a stake in the ground today, so to speak, and say, "This year I will take a big step forward in both knowing and obeying the Word of God, because it's that important!"