



TRUTH MATTERS

A Newsletter Discussing Matters Related To Truth Because Truth Matters

December 26, 2004

“Charting the Course” Eat Well This Year

‘Tis the season for resolutions. Nobody understood the power of resolutions more than Jonathan Edwards. While he was a college student he wrote 70 resolutions and kept most of them throughout his entire life. One of the resolutions he kept was this:

Resolved: To study the Scripture so steadily, constantly, and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive, myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.¹

Growing, advancing, increasing – that is the goal of Scripture daily reading. That means that we resolve to read daily, yes. But we must do more than read (acknowledge black symbols on white paper and pronounce syllables) – we must interact with the text – Read! Slow Down! Ponder! Query! Chew! See how every part fits together. (This gets to methodology. I’ll come back to that. First, let me help you come to the place where you love the truth.)

Paul tells the Thessalonians that a chief mark of a Christian is that they have been given a love for truth (cf. 2 Thess. 2:10)². That means that Christians, at their best, have saturated themselves in the Bible. They say with Job, “I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread” (Job 23:12). We are told that God led the children of Israel into hunger and fed them with manna to teach them, “that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deut. 8:3) – words quoted by Christ when he himself faced temptation (Matt. 4:4). On the night Jesus was betrayed, he prayed to his Father on behalf of his followers in these terms, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). The means by which God sanctifies men and women, setting them apart as his own special people, is the Word of Truth. Let us be a people saturated with truth!

There are several dangers lurking for those who do not saturate themselves with truth.

First, there is the danger of falling into a spiritual stupor. I see this fall as a gradual process. It is the product of a people saturated with T.V., sports, news headlines, political inquiries and the latest movies. The sheer pace of life affords us many excuses and justification for sacrificing the important and the excellent on the altar of the urgent. The constant sensory input from all sides is damaging (maybe even damning if it leads to a lack of love for the truth). We go from stereo to radio to television to movie screen. We hate silence. Or, at the very least, we are uncomfortable with silence. We are afraid of our own thoughts because we do not know how to think. Paul says that we are to “bring every thought into submission unto the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). Are we falling prey to the gently addictive effect of an entertainment driven culture? We justify hours of T.V. watching and have little desire to carve out times of silence necessary for

¹ The seventy resolutions of Edwards are found in Sereno Dwight, *Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1074), xx-xxi. This is resolution #28 taken from page xxi.

² Notice in this passage, 2 Thessalonians 2:10 that those who do not love truth are condemned to hell.

contemplative Bible reading. The result is that we have become a people with dulled senses who have fallen into a passive stupor. I call us as a people to wake up and read the TRUTH!

Second, there is the danger of being a kind of “second-handers”. I took this challenge to heart four years ago after I first met and heard John Piper. He challenged a group of us pastors to guard ourselves against the easy task of coming to the Scriptures solely to find sermons and lessons and answers raised by counseling questions and always relying on the commentaries and works of others. This is the danger of always reading what others think about what the Bible says and never wrestling with its meaning for yourself – “second-handers”. Piper said if you are going to satisfy your people on Sunday mornings your river better run deep.³ I am afraid that we (Christians in general) are not a people who are saturated with truth. Instead we are a shallow people saturated in the opinions of others who may be saturated with truth. We are a kind of second-hand lovers of truth. This is highly hypocritical. We give the air of loving truth but we have never really breathed that air for ourselves.

And the simple fact is that most devotional books breed this kind of second-hand living. D.A. Carson has said that most “devotional guides provide personal help for believers with private needs, fears, and hopes. But they do not provide a framework of what the Bible says – the ‘plotline’ or ‘storyline’ – the big picture that makes sense of all the little bits of the Bible. Wrongly used, such devotional guides may ultimately engender a wrong-headed view that God exists to sort out my problems and they may engender wrong interpretations of some passages because they are not required to see them in their ‘big picture’ context.”⁴ Only a systematic and repeated reading of the whole Bible can meet those challenges. Therefore, I call us as a people to dig deep and read the TRUTH!

The TRUTH MATTERS! If the Bible is coherent, then understanding the Bible means grasping how different things fit together. The Bible is not a piece-meal. Being a lover of truth means to read and study Scripture so as to see more and more pieces come together to form a glorious mosaic of a divine design. Turn off the television, lay aside the newspaper and read the TRUTH!

Let me offer you some practical suggestions. You feel free to stick with your method if you already have a steady discipline for reading. But if you are groping for a method, here is the method I gleaned from Jonathan Edwards – read with “pen-in-hand.” My favorite volume of Edward’s writings is the newly published work called *Notes on Scripture*.⁵ It was Edwards’ habit to read the Bible with a pen and paper beside him so that he could immediately write down any thought of application, inquiring that needed further study, or interesting observation. He wrote on used envelopes, pages of worthless books, old letters, etc. It was his desire to study the Scripture so steadily, constantly and frequently that he might perceive of himself to actually have grown by them. He didn’t want to guess, he wanted to see that there was growth. Growth accords with knowledge. So here are some suggestions:

1. Get a journal for the year and keep it with your Bible.

³ The lecture, “Brothers, Let the River Run Deep,” has now been put in print in a book authored by Dr. John Piper called *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), pp. 145-150. I refer to John Piper as my mentor-at-a-distance. He has caused many pieces of my theological, philosophical and pastoral puzzles to come together. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to God for the way in which He has directed my path lately through men like Piper!

⁴ Carson, D.A. *For the Love of God* vol. 1, Wheaton, ILL: Crossway Books, 1998. p. x.

⁵ Edwards, Jonathan. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Notes on Scripture* vol. 15. ed. by Stephen J. Stein. London: Yale University Press, 1998.

2. Write down four kinds of thoughts as you read. Mark a “Q,” an “O,” an “A,” or a “P”:

- Q – *Questions* that need further study.
- O – Interesting *observations* you never saw before; or a piece of the puzzle that fits elsewhere.
- A – Write out any thought of *application* that comes to mind as you read.
- P – Record in your journal *promises* that God has made.

3. Pray Scripture. Learn to distill what a passage is saying, and pray it back to the Lord – whether in petition, praise, thanksgiving, or uncertainty. In time your Bible reading will be so linked to your praying that the two will not always be differentiable.

4. Read two OT chapters every day in the morning when your mind is fresh; one chapter of poetry over lunch during the weekdays; and one chapter of the NT following dinner each weeknight. You will read the Bible through in the year. (Notice you will not be reading a Poetry passage or a NT passage on weekends. You will only read OT passages every day.)

5. Discipline yourself to stay current. For example, use Sunday afternoons to get caught up. Resolve that the TRUTH means more to you than football. Resolve to be current on your reading before you watch a game. Or, resolve that the TRUTH is more precious than sleep – don’t go to bed until the day’s reading is done. Or, resolve to not eat supper until you have eaten your spiritual food! We must ask ourselves how far we would go to discipline ourselves in the love of truth. Athletes will forgo sleep and food to stay single-minded during their training. Will we?

I pray that we would eat well this year – eat to our heart’s delight of the food that Jesus ate: “But [Jesus] answered, “It is written, “ ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”⁶ Dig in!

⁶ *The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (electronic ed.). Wheaton: Good News Publishers.