

## THE WORD OF GOD – Part Two Sermon – January 20, 2019

Have you heard the expression “garbage in, garbage out”? It is an expression that relates to what we hear, what we read, and what we see. If we hear, see and read things that are worthless then we will expel these things from within ourselves. What we put into our minds, what we allow entrance through our eyes and ears, will eventually affect our heart and mind and come out through our actions and through our words.

Proverbs tells us that “*As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he*” (Proverbs 23:7). What we dwell on, what we watch, what we see, what we listen to, what we read, anything we pay attention to will shape our being, affect our soul, and control our thoughts. That’s why we must be concerned with what we allow into our hearts and minds. Just as one act of love responds to another act of love, too much of one bad thing can lead to an appetite for many bad things. Just as what goes up must come down, what goes in must come out. As Jesus said, “*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*” (Luke 6:45).

This applies to the people we associate with as well. Because we all have a tendency to become like those we spend the most time with, we need to choose our companions carefully. Paul tells us in Corinthians that “*bad company ruins good morals*” (1 Corinthians 15:33). I found that statement to be true in my life.

I moved away from my home town for the first three years of high school but returned in my senior year. I came back as a virtual newcomer to that school. I was hungry for friendship so I decided to hang around those I had known since grade school. Unfortunately these people had matured into not so nice people. Their moral compass had strayed from grade school innocence to unencumbered high school selfishness. They cared only for themselves and would demean anyone who did not agree with them. Thankfully I soon came to my senses and left that crowd, knowing it would be the end of several long-time relationships. I was hanging around people of bad morals and I did not want what little morals I had left to become ruined because of them.

Now don’t get me wrong. I was not a truly moral person myself. I had my own vices and compared to God’s standard I was no better than those friends which I had forsaken. But I did recognize that I could easily fall deeper into the immoral abyss if I continued to hang around my grade school friends. So I separated myself from them and sought out friends who had a better moral compass than I.

The Scripture says that God seeks after us and draws us to Himself (John 6:44). That was certainly true for me. In my search for a moral compass whose true north never wavered, God directed my path into a circle of friends at college who were born again Christians. These friends became my lifeline throughout all four of my college years. As they demonstrated true morality and true compassion towards me I found myself desiring what they had. In my third year of college I realized that in these four friends I had seen with my own eyes the very God after whom I had been seeking. The Lord Himself was visible to me through their words and actions.

At that point I was so unhappy with my life that I was willing to look anywhere for something different – something or someone that could change my life – some power beyond myself that could alter the course of my life and change the direction I was headed. And when I saw the difference that Christ had made in the lives of my friends at college I decided to read for myself the source material from which they drew their strength.

So I went to the college bookstore at Hayward State in February of 1968 and purchased the J.B. Phillips version of the New Testament. Besides the Good News Version, this was one of the first modern English versions of the Bible. I brought it back to my dorm room and began to read it from cover to cover – Matthew to Revelation. Before I reached the end I knew that Jesus Christ was God and the One for whom I had been searching for so many years. I gave my heart to Him in that small dorm room at Carlos Bee Residence Hall in Hayward, California in the spring of 1968 and have never looked back.

Admittedly I was ready for a God encounter. But I did not suspect that I would have that encounter within the pages of the Bible. Before reading the Bible for myself I had no interest and no idea what treasures lay inside the covers of that book. Since I did not grow up in a Christian home my impression of the Bible came from my family. They did not believe there was anything special about it. It was just another book written by imperfect men. Besides the dusty old King James we had one large, ornate Bible that was known as the “Family Bible”. In its pages were places where you could record your family history. It was a book that was meant to be passed down from generation to generation. And though it was called a Family Bible, no one in the family read anything in that book other than the names of deceased relatives. I don’t remember anyone ever opening that or any other Bible and reading the Word of God read in our home.

Once it became known that I had become a believer in Christ the skeptics in my family began to challenge my faith. Though they knew very little about the Word of God they questioned its accuracy. Some did this out of a desire to know more, others did it to mock the Word of God and people like me who believed in what they considered “nonsense”. As much as they professed a desire to know the answers to their questions, what they were really desiring was a verbal challenge; a debate if you will - their beliefs against mine. There was no heart desire to know the truth; Just a not-so-subtle challenge to the authority of God’s Word. Even when I feebly attempted to answer their questions, their ears remained deaf to the Word of God

I learned very quickly in my infant stage of Christianity that I was not equipped to answer the deeper questions of theology that some posed to me. I also learned that I did not need to answer fools who mocked a God they did not know. I could remain steadfast in my faith without knowing where Cain’s wife came from or why Christianity was better than Buddhism. I did not need to respond to either inquisitor to know the truth of what I had read. As much as they might have hoped it would, their questions did not undermine my faith in God. After several unsuccessful attempts to reason with them I soon learned to be obedient to the words of Jesus as recorded in Mathew.

MATTHEW 10:14

*“Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or city, shake the dust off your feet.”*

What Jesus was saying to me was that I should not waste any more time with those who were resistant to the gospel. My time would be better spent with those who would listen. So I moved on and began searching for those who were receptive to the Word of God.

Like my family, the world is constantly challenging us and mocking us because their ears are also deaf to the Word of God. They have no desire to hear it and no desire to know it. So there is a great lack of knowledge and understanding of what the Bible teaches. Unfortunately the church is also full of people who are ignorant of God’s Word.

According to a survey done in 2013 by the American Bible Society, (<http://religionnews.com/2013/04/04/poll-americans-love-the-bible-but-dont-read-it-much/> ) the average American household has 4.4 Bibles in their home. Even though more than half of Americans think the Bible has too little influence on the culture at large, only one in five Americans read the Bible on a regular basis. 88 percent said they own a Bible and 80 percent think the Bible is sacred but only 61 percent wish they read the Bible more. The 57 percent of the people who read their Bibles said they only read it four times a year or less. Only 26 percent of Americans said they read their Bible on a regular basis (four or more times a week). As for the youth, the younger generation seems to be moving away from the Bible. A majority (57 percent) of those ages 18-28 read their Bibles less than three times a year, if at all.

Doug Birdsall, president of American Bible Society, compares the problem of Christians not reading the Bible as to obesity. He said this: *“We have an awful lot of people who realize they’re overweight, but they don’t follow a diet. People realize the Bible has values that would help them in their spiritual health, but they just don’t read it.”* Why is this? What is the “disconnect” between desire and doing?

Since the beginning of time man’s will has had a direct influence on his behavior. What we choose to do, what we choose to listen to, what we choose to read, determines what we will do. If we choose not to read the Bible we are choosing not to follow its guidelines. There is life to be found in reading the Scriptures, for within its pages the heart of God speaks directly to the heart of man. But if we know not what that life is, what the heart of God is, we cannot absorb it into our lives. Just as we cannot lose weight if we do not limit our intake, so we cannot follow the rules of life if we do not know what the rules are.

Our own justice system says, “ignorance is no excuse for the law”. Failure to read God’s word is also no excuse. For God Himself says, even if we do not know the written Word of God, *“His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse* (Romans 1:20). Refusing to listen to God’s Word does not excuse anyone from being accountable to their Creator. We will all be held accountable at the Throne of Judgment whether we acknowledge God’s existence here or not. So if we are to be held accountable to God’s Word how much better would it be to know what that Word of God says so that we can conform to it, rather than be ignorant and suffer the consequence of our ignorance.

We are all influenced by something or someone. Even the scripturally ignorant would agree that it is far better to be influenced by truth than to be influenced by lies. But how do we know which is which? How do we know whether what is influencing us is true or not? That’s where reading the Word of God becomes helpful; For Scripture provides the discernment that we naturally lack.

If we are not letting our minds be influenced by the Word of God then we are, by default, allowing our minds to be influenced by the world, the flesh and the devil (1 John 2:16). Each has its consequences; whatever influence we allow into our lives will eventually be manifested in our actions. That’s why Paul tells us to be careful of what we allow our mind to dwell on.

#### ROMANS 12:2

*“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

In his book, “As a Man Thinketh”, 20<sup>th</sup> Century British philosopher and Inspirational author James Allen said this: “A man’s mind may be likened to a garden, which may be intelligently cultivated or allowed to run wild; but whether cultivated or neglected, it must, and will, *bring forth (something)*. If no

useful seeds are *put* into it, then an abundance of useless weed seeds will *fall* therein, and will continue to produce their kind.”

The Apostle James echoes these thoughts in the area of temptation. What we allow our minds to dwell on will determine the outcome of our actions.

JAMES 1:13-15

*“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt any one. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”*

When we allow our lusts to carry us away and entice us to sin it will give birth to sin. And consistent sin without repentance leads to death. We need to be careful what we allow minds to dwell on. But how do we do that? How do we change our current way of thinking? How do we renew our minds? How do we resist sin? The Psalmist gives us His answer.

PSALM 119:11

*“Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee.”*

Once again James Allen reminds us, “Just as a gardener cultivates his plot, keeping it free from weeds, and growing the flowers and fruits which he requires, so may a man tend the garden of his mind, weeding out all the worn, useless, and impure thoughts, and cultivating toward perfection the flowers and fruits of right, useful, and pure thoughts.”

Paul also provides a solution to keep our minds garden free of weeds.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9

*“Whatever is true, whatever is honorable,, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things which you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”*

James Allen goes on to say this: “Every thought seed sown or allowed to fall into the mind, and to take root there produces its own, blossoming sooner or later into act, and bearing its own fruitage of opportunity and circumstance. Good thoughts bear good fruit, bad thoughts bad fruit.”

“Good thoughts and actions can never produce bad results. Bad thoughts and actions can never produce good results. This is but saying that nothing can come from corn but corn, nothing from nettles but nettles. (People) understand this law in the natural world, and work with it. But few understand it in the mental and moral world.... and they, therefore, do not cooperate with it.”

These thoughts are consistent with the words of Jesus in Matthew.

MATTHEW 7:17

*“Every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.”*

In conclusion, James Allen goes on to make these observations: “(People) imagine that thought can be kept secret, but it cannot. It rapidly crystalizes into habit....and habit solidifies into circumstances.... A particular train of thought persisted in, be it good or bad, cannot fail to produce results on the character and circumstances. (People) cannot *directly* chose (their) circumstances, but (they) can choose their thoughts, and so indirectly, yet surely, shape (their) circumstances. (But) as the physically weak man can make himself strong by careful and patient training, so the (person) of weak thoughts can make them strong by exercising (themselves) in right thinking.”

I found this principle to be true in my own life. Prior to becoming a believer my mind was filled with all sorts of worldly things. The flesh was paramount, the self was primary, and the desire to satisfy my own lusts was overwhelming. I knew I was caught in a vicious cycle of sin and soon came to realize that I had neither the means nor the method to overcome the power of sin in my life. I was powerless over the power which controlled me.

Thankfully God encompassed me with friends who believed in the Word of God and followed its precepts. They surrounded me with love and acceptance and modeled for me what God was like. And they read their Bible. Desperate for what they had I too picked up the Bible and read it. And it was through reading the Word of God that I came to know and understand the love which God had for me. And through the love revealed in Scripture I found release from sin and forgiveness for my evil deeds.

What happened to me - the transformation that I experienced that spring day back in 1998 - came from the Holy Spirit becoming active in my life through the reading of the Word of God. And that same transforming power continues today as I continue to read His Word daily. In 1Timothy Paul reminds us of just how powerful the reading of Scripture can be.

#### 1TIMOTHY 3:16-17

*“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”*

That is why this church teaches and preaches the Word of God. Within its pages lie the catalyst for change and the hope of all who seek after it. I have been reading through the entire Bible every year for the past 21 years and I can say truthfully that God’s Word continues to bring about change in my life as I read His Word. Many times I have been grateful that God convicts me through the Words I have read that day - in the privacy of my own home, in my bedroom with the door closed - rather than confronting me in public because I refused to let Him enter my heart through His Word.

I pray that you too would find comfort in the Scriptures as you read through it daily and that you too would find the change that God’s Word can bring happening in your heart as I did in mine. God’s Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Psalm 119:105). So take up your light and let it shine before men as Jesus tells us to in Matthew.

#### MATTHEW 15:14-16

*“You are the light of the word. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; not does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”*

Our light comes from God Himself. Our sinful nature has no light, only darkness. But the Spirit within us shines through us to illuminate the world. This light is found in Scripture. It is my hope today that you will let God shine His light on you through His Word, and that this Word will shine through you to others. This will only happen if you follow the advice of King Solomon when he said:

PROVERBS 4:20-22

*“My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your sight; keep them in the midst of your heart. For they are life to those who find them and health to all their flesh.”*

God gave us His word that we might meditate on it day and night; that we might think on His word, pay attention to His word and obey His word. For His word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Those who follow that path will find life. Those who ignore that path do so at their peril. Let us be among those who find life within the pages of God’s word. For God’s word brings life to those who find it and health to all their flesh. As I close let the words of this next song be a reminder of just that.

ALL THROUGH THE DAY

All through the day, all through the night  
Dwell on His promises, walk in His light  
Darkness shall fall at His command  
All through the day and night we’re in His hand.

(Words and Music by Tom Howard, © 1977 Joyful Road Music, CCLI #829565)

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