

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 9-28-14 AM NOTES
"MATURING DISCIPLES: THE PRIMARY MEANS TO MATURITY"
1 PETER 1:23-2:3
#4 in Series, "The Making, Maturing, and Mobilizing of Disciples"

Matthew 28:19-20 (NKJV) "19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age."

"I advise you my son...in reading the Bible, to remember that it is for the purpose of making wiser and more virtuous. I have myself, for many years, made it a practice to read through the Bible once every year...My custom is to read four or five chapters every morning, immediately after rising from my bed. It employs about an hour of my time, and seems to me the most suitable manner of beginning the day."
—John Quincy Adams, 6th President of the United States

"I rise regularly at 6:00 in the morning and after dressing give all the time until our 8:00 a.m. breakfast to the study of the Word. I find time for brief studies throughout the day and again in the evening. I make it a general rule to touch nothing but the Bible after the evening meal."
—Dr. Howard Kelly

I. The Word of God Is Incorruptible in Its Essence (1:23)

A. The Description of the Word of God (v. 23)

Romans 1:23b (NKJV) "...the incorruptible God..."

"The Bible is alive. It has feet; it runs after me. It has hands; it lays hold of me..."
—Martin Luther

Hebrews 4:12 (NKJV) "For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

B. The Work of the Word of God (v. 23)

James 1:18 (NIV) "He chose to give us birth through the **word** of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created."

John 3:6 (NKJV) "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV) "Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

John 11:26a (NKJV) "And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."

II. The Word of God Is Indestructible Before Its Enemies (1:24-25)

Psalms 119:89 (NKJV) "Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven."

III. The Word of God Is Indispensable in Its Edifying (2:1-3)

A. The Negatives That Exclude Maturity (v. 1)

1. Malice
2. Deceit
3. Hypocrisy
4. Envy
5. Evil Speaking

B. The Nourishment That Enables Maturity (vv. 2-3)

“When believers aren’t growing, it can usually be traced to a failure to be in God’s Word. They go to church and sit. They complain of not getting much out of church or the Christian life. They are weak and run down when it comes to facing temptations, trials, problems, and challenges. They lack the energy to do much of anything for the Lord. Their souls are starved for wholesome spiritual food. The Bible refers to itself as milk, bread, and meat, but spiritually a lot of Christians are subsisting on cola, french-fries, and candy. They aren’t growing because they refuse to feed themselves. Ironically, the solution to their problems is the very thing they refuse to feed upon—God’s Word.”

—John MacArthur

Practical Application

1. If your desire for the Word is diminished or nonexistent, resolve to ruthlessly examine your life and repent of any revealed sin.
2. Remove the mental “junk food” that is killing your spiritual appetite.
3. Develop a plan for prioritizing the Word of God in your daily life.
4. Take advantage of every opportunity to hear the Word taught.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 9-28-14 AM
“MATURING DISCIPLES: THE PRIMARY MEANS TO MATURITY”
1 PETER 1:23-2:3
#4 in Series, “The Making, Maturing, and Mobilizing of Disciples”

Review: We began this series by looking at the God given mission of the church – this church and every church. The mission is the Great Commission that is given to the church in all four Gospels and the book of Acts. The best known statement of our mission is **Matthew 28:19-20 (NKJV)** “¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” In the first message in this series, we spent time examining that mission and since the command is to make disciples, we examined the Scriptures to see what a disciple looks like.

In the second message, we looked at the process in making disciples. We saw that it begins with evangelizing non-believers; it continues with teaching the new believers the basics of the faith – assurance of salvation, baptism, their identity and resources in Christ, the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and spiritual disciplines. The final part of the process is to get them plugged into a local church where they can connect with God through corporate worship, grow in a small group, serve others through ministry, and share the Gospel with non-believers, and thus become a disciple who is making disciples who will make disciples.

In the third message last week we saw the importance of an “On Mission Mindset”. We saw that from a biblical perspective, the Christian life is a mission trip. We looked at the massive amount of lostness in the world and then gained hope by seeing what the early church did to impact the lostness in their day.

In today’s message we are going to focus on the maturing of disciples (remember that every Christian is a disciple and maturing is a never ending process that continues until we go to be with Jesus). Today, we are going to look at the primary means to maturity – the Word of God.

There is no shortcut to maturity for a disciple of Jesus Christ. Growing in maturity requires an all-out commitment to continuously take in the word of God and become so consumed with it that it controls the way we look at the world, and the way we think; it becomes the standard by which we evaluate everything, and the way we view God, ourselves, others and our circumstances. We are to look at everything through a biblical lens. Dr. Donald Barnhouse in the mid-1900’s was one of the best known Pastors in America. He was the Pastor of 10th Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia and was the main speaker on a national radio program. He was one of the greatest Bible scholars of the 20th century. Dr. Barnhouse was traveling by train and was reading his Bible. Sitting across from him was a young man engrossed in with several news magazines. After a while he recognized Dr. Barnhouse and started a conversation with him. He said, “Dr. Barnhouse, how can I be a man of the Word like you? How can I know the Bible like you?” Dr. Barnhouse was never known for his subtlety and replied, “Son as long as you continue to read those magazines more than this book, you will know more about those magazines than you know about this book.”

In my files, I have testimony after testimony from people mightily used of God in various walks of life other than pastors or seminary professors that tell of what God’s Word means to them and the place of prominence it has in their lives. Let me share two with you. John Quincy Adams, the 6th President of the United States in a letter to his son said this: “I advise you my son... in reading the Bible, to remember that it is for the purpose of making wiser and more virtuous. I have myself, for many years, made it a practice to read through the Bible once every year... My custom is, to read four or five chapters every morning, immediately after rising from my bed. It employs about an hour of my time, and seems to me the most suitable manner of beginning the day.” Dr. Howard Kelly was a pioneer in the field of medicine. He was a professor of Gynecology at Johns Hopkins University from 1889-1919. He was then Chief Surgeon in a hospital named after him in Baltimore. Here is what he said about the Word of God. “I rise regularly at 6:00 in the morning and after dressing give all the time until our 8:00 AM breakfast to the study of the

Word. I find time for brief studies throughout the day and again in the evening. I make it a general rule to touch nothing but the Bible after the evening meal.”

Perhaps those two testimonies sound fanatical to you. My response would be, “Dear Lord, give us more fanatics like these!” There is an appalling ignorance of the Bible among those who call themselves Christians in America. Someone sarcastically said that the greatest dust storm in history would happen if every professing Christian in America at the same time picked up all the Bibles in their home and shook them real hard. I heard about one young man interviewing with a Pulpit Committee about becoming the Pastor of their church. He obviously had not been a very good student of the Word. He was asked to recount the story of The Good Samaritan. Here is what he said. “There was a Samaritan who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and he fell among thieves who threw him into thorns. The thorns grew up and choked him and he went and met the Queen of Sheba and she gave him a thousand talents of gold and a hundred changes of remnants. Then as he rode along wearing his new remnants, his hair got caught in a limb and he was left hanging in mid-air. Along came Delilah and cut his hair and because he had no more strength, he fell on stony ground and they picked up 12 basketfuls of what was left of him.” After listening to that, the pulpit committee asked him to leave the room while they discussed his calling. When the young man was out of the room, one committee member said, “I don’t know; he is awful young”. Two other committee members jumped in and said, “Yes, he is young, but he sure knows his Bible!” I’m sure that story was made up, but here is something that is not made up: There is an appalling ignorance of God’s Word in the churches of America and that is why there are so few mature disciples of Jesus Christ. There is no shortcut to becoming a mature disciple of Jesus Christ apart from a regular, lengthy intake of the Word of God.

For the rest of our time this morning, let me take you to one of my favorite passages concerning the Word of God – 1 Peter 1:23-2:3. My prayer is that God would put a deep and an abiding craving in your soul for the pure Word of God that you might grow to greater and greater levels of maturity.

I. The Word of God Is Incorruptible in Its Essence (1:23)

Let’s examine this verse a little out of the order that the words occur.

A. The Description of the Word of God (V23)

He tells us first that the Word of God is “incorruptible”. We read in **Romans 1:23 (NKJV)** that God is, “...the incorruptible God...” It only makes sense that this incorruptible God who “breathes out” this Word of God (“inspired” in 2 Timothy 3:16 means “God breathed”) would breathe out an incorruptible Word. That word “incorruptible” means exempt from decay and final perishing. Corruption is woven into everything on this fallen earth, but the Word of God is “incorruptible”.

Notice also that this incorruptible Word is alive. The Scriptures have spiritual life. The Greek word used here (*zao*) not only means living, but causing to live. The Word of God brings life. The reformer, Martin Luther said, “The Bible is alive. It has feet; it runs after me. It has hands; it lays hold of me...” **Hebrews 4:12 (NKJV)** “For the word of God *is living* and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

Not only is the Word of God incorruptible and living, it also abides forever. Cultures change; man’s standards change, people change, governments change, but the incorruptible, living Word of God abides forever and never changes.

B. The Work of the Word of God (V23a)

It is the Word of God that God uses to bring about the new birth. **James 1:18 (NIV)** “He chose to give us birth through the **word** of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.” The “seed” as it is used here represents the source of life. When we were conceived physically, the seed that brought physical life was corrupt because of sin entering the world, that is, the seed had death and decay in it. My Father died; his father died; his Father died, Adam died and if Jesus doesn’t return soon, I will die. Our physical birth was through corruptible seed because of the curse of sin. Physically, we are in a constant state of corruption. Every time I look in a mirror, I am reminded that I am corrupting. While we are in

these corrupting bodies, Jesus Christ has made it possible for us to be spiritually born again. Just as there are two involved in our physical birth (our mother and father), there are two involved in our spiritual birth – the Word of God and the Spirit of God. **John 3:6 (NKJV)** “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” **1 Peter 1:23a (NKJV)** “having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God...” The Spirit of God implants the seed of the incorruptible living Word of God into our spiritually dead life and there is a spiritual birth. We see our condition of lostness (“conviction of sin righteousness and judgment” John 16:8) and we see Jesus crucified for us and risen from the dead). We respond in repentance and faith and we are made a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), adopted into God’s forever family, baptized by the Spirit into union with Christ, and made secure through the sealing of the Spirit. From our perspective, that all happens together. We have nothing to boast in except the incorruptible living word of God that was applied to our lives by the Spirit of God. Because the seed of the Word of God is incorruptible, that regenerated part of me will never die or corrupt. That’s what Jesus was referring to in **John 11:26a (NKJV)** “And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.” Tell me how a person could experience this new birth and then have no love for, no hunger for this incorruptible Word of God? The Word of God is incorruptible in its essence.

II. The Word of God Is Indestructible before Its Enemies (V24-25)

God’s Word cannot be destroyed. **Psalms 119:89 (NKJV)** “Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven.” Peter quotes here from Isaiah 40:6-8 and contrasts God’s Word to our human bodies and the grass and flowers of the field. Think of all the heroes of history that are now gone from this earth. Think of how those beautiful those flowers are but how soon they wilt and lose their beauty and are thrown in the trash. Man and everything tied to this fallen world is destructible, but the Word of God is indestructible! Satan through evil men has consistently tried to destroy the Word of God, but he has always failed. The Roman Emperor Diocletian in 303 AD decreed that all Bibles should be destroyed and all Christians who loved the Word of God should be killed. Many Bibles were destroyed and large numbers of Christians were martyred. In his egotistical mind, Diocletian thought that he had succeeded. Over a burned Bible he erected a column and placed this caption on it: “Extinct is the name Christian”. But Diocletian died and the next Emperor was Constantine. In just 10 years the insignia on the Roman shields was changed from a pagan symbol to the cross.

The French atheist and philosopher Voltaire said before his death in 1799, “One hundred years from now there will not be a Bible in the earth save as an antiquarian curiosity.” By that, he meant that the only Bibles would be in museums. After Voltaire’s death the Geneva Bible Society had bought the printing presses used to publish Voltaire’s atheist Bible hating works and used to print Bibles. Now over 200 years after Voltaire’s death, the Bible is the best selling, most printed book in history. The Word of God is incorruptible in its essence and indestructible before its enemies.

III. The Word of God Is Indispensible in Its Edifying (2:1-3)

Notice that chapter 2 starts with a “therefore”. That word ties verses 1-3 to the verses that we have just been looking at. “Therefore, because the Word of God is incorruptible, living, the means of our new birth, and indestructible, here is our response!” Our response is to allow the Word to edify or build up or mature us. The same Word that is the means of our new birth is also the means of our maturity.

A. The Negatives That Exclude Maturity (V1)

God’s Word not only is alive; it gives spiritual life and nourishes that spiritual life. The nourishment must be taken in. It is not enough to have the Word of God and to say nice and true things about the Word of God; the Word must be taken in to our lives. In this verse we see what takes away our appetite for the Word of God.

1. Malice – This word speaks of wickedness in general. It is especially used of the desire to inflict pain on another. It is a bitter unforgiving heart. You will never mature as a disciple of Jesus Christ if there is malice in our heart.

2. Deceit – The Greek word here means underhanded dealings, dishonest motives, or craftiness. Is there anyone you are deceiving right now – a spouse, parent, boss, customer? You will find the Bible boring instead of edifying until you “lay aside” this sin.
3. Hypocrisy – This Greek word originally referred to an actor putting on a show. It is similar to deceit. Hypocrisy is acting like someone you are not, playing a role.
4. Envy – This refers to a feeling of ill will in response to something good happening to another. It involves resentment and perpetual discontentment.
5. Evil Speaking – This is defaming or slandering a person. It is more generally conversation that tears down instead of builds up.

We must lay these aside! That Greek word was used of taking off dirty clothes. They cannot be tolerated even in small amounts. Why is it so important for us to lay these sins aside?

B. The Nourishment That Enables Maturity (V2-3)

It is sins like those in verse 1 that rob us of our appetite for God’s Word. Using the example of a newborn baby, if you have been born again, you have a God implanted desire for the spiritual nourishment of His Word. Just as a newborn baby doesn’t have to be taught to have an appetite, a born again person has an appetite for God’s word. One reason there would not be an appetite in a baby is if the baby is sick. Here’s what sickness looks like in a spiritual baby – malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking. Lay it aside and if you are truly born again, the appetite will return. Another possible reason for a lack of spiritual appetite is being filled with bad food. When you have your mind full of junk, you stop desiring the pure milk of the word. Here is a good quote. “When believers aren’t growing, it can usually be traced to a failure to be in God’s Word. They go to church and sit. They complain of not getting much out of church or the Christian life. They are weak and run down when it comes to facing temptations, trials, problems, and challenges. They lack the energy to do much of anything for the Lord. Their souls are starved for wholesome spiritual food. The Bible refers to itself as milk, bread, and meat, but spiritually a lot of Christians are subsisting on cola, french-fries, and candy. They aren’t growing because they refuse to feed themselves. Ironically, the solution to their problems is the very thing they refuse to feed upon – God’s Word.” [John MacArthur, *Unleashing God’s Word in Your Life*, pages 141-142].

It is interesting that the word translated “desire” is an imperative, a command. It is more than a slight desire. It is translated “long for” in the ESV and “crave” in the NIV. The Scripture commands a desire, a longing, a craving. That only makes sense if the craving for the Word of God is natural and the only thing that is hindering it is sin and filling our lives with junk like large doses of TV, social media, novels, and the like. Just like junk food in the physical realm in small moderate amounts does not harm us physically, these things aren’t evil in moderation, but if they have a hold on you, perhaps you need to go on a TV fast or a social media fast so that the craving for the Word can return.

Practical Application

1. If your desire for the Word is diminished or nonexistent resolve to ruthlessly examine your life. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal sin – especially the sins listed in verse 1. As they are revealed, confess and repent and leave them behind.
2. Check out your mental junk food. If something is robbing you of time in the Word, take drastic action. If you can’t control it, get rid of it completely. It may be a hobby, social media, TV, video games, whatever! It is not legalism to say I can’t have anything to do with this thing that others can do in moderation. Nothing is worth robbing you of spiritual nourishment.
3. Develop a plan. That plan ought to include reading the Word, studying the Word, memorizing the Word, and proclaiming the Word. Get a study Bible and most all will have a Bible reading plan in the back that has you in both the Old and New Testaments every day. For example, The MacArthur Study Bible and The ESV Study Bible both have this.
4. Take advantage of every opportunity to hear the word taught – small group, Sunday morning and Sunday night.

CONCLUSION

There is no short cut to spiritual maturity. It comes through the Word of God applied to your life. It's time to get serious.