

## Intellectual Environments

**We are transformed as we apply Biblical truth to our mind and heart. (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Col. 3:16)**



Pastor and author Mark Buchanan said, “Any deep change in how we live begins with a deep change in how we think.”

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” 2 Tim. 3:16,17

If we are to grow into the people of God has created us to be, we must sharpen our minds and allow our intellects to be transformed by God. But changing our thinking does a lot more than make us think more deeply.

During the last half of the twentieth century, many people began to realize that Christian education as we imagined it in the nineteenth and twentieth century was not accomplishing what we hoped it would accomplish. The modern idea that education would transform people had been well tested in our society, and had proven to be a false hope, socially, culturally, and spiritually. We have achieved brilliance without conscience. How many know... You can recite Scripture and still hold deep grudges, lack forgiveness and treat your neighbor wife, husband, kids or neighbors badly?

It became clear that Christian formation was not nearly so much about information as about a profound inner transformation. This is a radical reversal of our information-driven, self-serving reading of the Bible. We must recognize that mere information never brings transformation.

Believing that the head and heart are to be integrated and not divorced, the goal is never about just obtaining more information. Transformation of mind and heart comes to us through wisdom and revelation. What we discover is that we need both.

Encountering Jesus engages both intellect and revelation. The teaching and preaching of sound doctrine is *absolutely essential*, adhering to the authority and inerrancy of Scripture. Believing that the head and heart are to be integrated and not divorced, the goal is never about just obtaining more information. Transformation of mind and heart comes to us through wisdom and revelation. What we discover is that we need both.

Typically, the Bible has been reduced to something that is studied, memorized and debated but not heard personally. God’s Word was meant for so much more. Biblical faithfulness

is more than just mailing down the meaning of a text.

The point is to respond appropriately to God's Word, we *must* study it but we also have to engage our hearts. We must strike a delicate balance between historical-critical engagement with scripture and opening oneself to the Word's life-transforming potential.

The goal, then, of scripture reading is to internalize and personalize the Scripture so that its truth can affect how we think, our attitudes, and how we live, our actions. This, however, is not always the case.

Look at John 5:39-40, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, *yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*" (Emphasis mine.) The Pharisees knew it all. They had it down. Every jot and tittle. They had the outside polished and looking good.

Eugene Peterson noted in his book, A Reversed Thunder, "The Pharisees had an extensive and meticulous knowledge of Scripture. They revered it. They memorized it. They used it to regulate every detail of life. So why did Jesus excoriate them? Because the words were studied and not heard. For them, the Scriptures had become a book to use, not a means by which to listen to God."

The point is not so much to get into the word, as it is to get the word into us. Having a doctrine pass before the mind is not what the Bible means by knowing the truth. It's only when it reaches down deep into the heart that the truth begins to set us free.



It is critical to approach the Bible as living and active and sharper than a two edged sword, not as metaphor but as reality. The words are not merely words on a page, but words that connect to the core of us. *Living words must be read in an alive manner.*

"Behold, you desire truth *in the innermost being*" (Ps. 51:6 NASB).

Col. 3:16 – "Let the word of Christ  *dwell in you richly...*"

This means our approach to the Scriptures would be one with openness, wonder, curiosity and vulnerability so that it "comes alive" in our hearts and transforms us from the inside out. It is much more than intellectual cognition of truth. It is the personal experience of truth.

It is critical to approach the Bible as living and active and sharper than a two edged sword, not as metaphor but as reality. The words are not merely words on a page, but words that connect to the core of us. *Living words must be read in an alive manner.* Thus, when we



approach scripture as the living word of God it invites us to pay attention to how God may be speaking to us in a fresh way and it becomes a place of encounter with Jesus.

### **We Must Understand the Text on its Own Terms.**

Eugene Peterson wrote, "Exegesis is the farthest thing from pedantry; exegesis is an act of love. It means loving the one who speaks the words enough to want to get the words right. Exegesis does not mean mastering the text, it means submitting to it; not

taking charge of it and imposing my knowledge on it, but entering the world of text and letting the text "read" me."

This means not picking and choosing Biblical texts and tying them together for our own purposes. If we approach God's Word as a self-serving tool to impose our purposes and agendas we will miss what God is saying to us, saying about himself, and His Word will have no meaningful connection to our lives. It's a discipline of openness to God's control of our lives for God's purposes through the writings of Scripture.

### **It is Best Understood in Community**

Although not referring specifically to Bible reading but to discipleship the principle, it remain, author Luke Timothy Johnson writes, "The learning must be personal to be real, but if it is only individual, then it runs the risk of being idiosyncratic and perhaps distorted. Any talk about Jesus must therefore be placed firmly within the context of the community of the church."<sup>1</sup> In other words, the best protection against doctrinal error, fanaticism, wayward passions, and ambition gone wild, is discernment and accountability within the church community.

### **It Must be Studied**

There should always be room for serious study that does not bypass critical scholarship. Context always should be given focused attention...for no authentic transformational engagement will occur in our lives if we approach God's Word haphazardly and unintentionally. We should not neglect or minimize the importance of strong, logical, careful thinking. "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).



There should always be room for serious study that does not bypass critical scholarship. Context always should be given focused attention...for no authentic transformational engagement will occur in our lives if we approach God's Word haphazardly and unintentionally.



Yet A.W. Tozer cautions, "Sound Bible exposition is an imperative must in the Church of the Living God. Without it no church can be a New Testament church in any strict meaning of that term. But exposition may be carried on in such a way as to leave the hearers devoid of any true spiritual nourishment whatever. For it is not mere words that nourish the soul, but God Himself, and unless and until the hearers find God in personal experience they are not the better for having heard the truth. The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into Him, that they may delight in His Presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God Himself in the core and center of their hearts."

### **It Must be Lived.**

Most Christians know far more of the Bible than they're living. But it's all to be lived. It was given to us so we could live it.

James 1:22 says, "Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. DO WHAT IT SAYS." The Greek word used here and translated "listen" is a word that meant to audit a class, like at a university. Auditing a class is a lot different than taking it for a credit. You don't have to turn in your homework, or even do homework if you don't want to. Neither do you have to take tests; you simply come to class as frequently or as infrequently as you like. Your only obligation, really, is to listen. But you are not accountable to what you hear. What James is saying is "Don't just audit God's Word." Our obligation is more than just listening. It's doing.

In conclusion, engaging the head and the heart for transformation, is a radical reversal of our information-driven, self-serving reading of the Bible. We must recognize that mere information never brings transformation. It is a person that we are learning, not a book. We are connecting with God, not words. We experience the mystery of the gospel, we don't learn about it. Otherwise we will find ourselves, forty years from now still struggling with the same problems, still making the same mistakes, still harboring the same doubts, and still missing the One who calls us the Beloved.

---

<sup>i</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Living Jesus*, (Harper Collins: San Francisco, 1999), p. 75.