

Bible Teaching For Spiritual Maturity

The pastor climbed the steps of the platform to the pulpit and started his sermon. He was warm, friendly, and eager to preach. He started with a description of a contemporary event and then applied it to the church urging them to follow Jesus and love others. After about 10 minutes, he read the Bible passage that was printed in the bulletin. It helped to prove his introduction. Then he proceeded for the rest of his sermon to use a series of contemporary personal illustrations, stories, humorous jokes and Power Point slides that supported his message. His sermon lasted about twenty-five minutes. He never explained the words or the details of the biblical passage that he read, but he did conclude his sermon with a call to action—to be willing to die for others. He hoped that the people left the church with a commitment to love others more. Maybe they were convicted by one of his contemporary illustrations, Power Point slides or jokes, or were impressed with his personal charisma. This is the typical style of “Bible teaching” in many churches today and the result is immature Christians.

MY PEOPLE LOVE IT. Today, it seems that many Christians are more concerned with the pastor’s speaking style and personal charisma than with the content of his teaching. Many will share that their pastor is a wonderful shepherd and Bible teacher. It is not uncommon to hear someone complain that their pastor is not people focused. But far fewer will claim that their pastor is anything other than a great Bible teacher. They have words of high praise. Yet if you listen to their pastor’s sermons online or attend their church, it is sad to realize that often believers have settled for mediocre to very shallow teaching of the Bible.

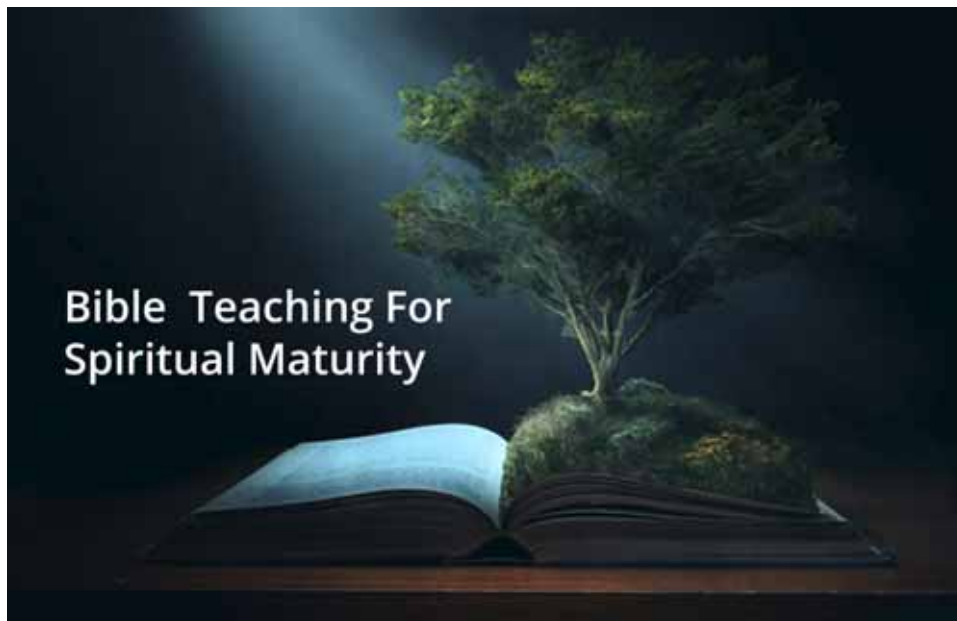
It is common to find preaching that does not explain the Bible passage or verses that God so carefully and miraculously

had the prophets and apostles write. Topical preaching usually bounces from one passage to another, skipping books, entire chapters and selecting maybe one single “very meaningful” verse. That may be the only verse the pastor reads in his message and then perhaps never revisited. His goal is

not to teach the Bible but to present topics he wants to share. He is not interested in helping the church understand the books that God wrote or why God wrote them. His style of preaching reveals that he is driven by personal interests. He has missed

the greater calling to teach the entire counsel of God to his people (Acts 20:27).

In Jeremiah 5:30-31, the prophet rebuked both the prophets and priests in Judah. When God rebukes both priests and



prophets, it is time to pay attention. The rebuke is important because Jeremiah's words, which are God's words, also apply to us today.

An appalling and horrible thing
Has happened in the land:
The prophets prophesy falsely,
And the priests rule on their own authority;
And My people love it so!
But what will you do at the end of it?
Jeremiah 5:31 (NASB)

Notice the opening statement in these two verses. God said an appalling and horrible thing had happened. What happened? The prophets had created their own message. If we read the preceding verses that God wrote, we discover in Jeremiah 5:12-13 that He announced the prophets had spoken error in order to make their messages positive. That made the people happy. It reminds us of Isaiah 30:10 where Scripture records the people of Judah had asked for pleasant words to be preached. They wanted to be encouraged, uplifted.

One would think that the faithful would have wanted to hear from God and would have been able to identify false teaching, but notice in Jeremiah 5:31 that God said the people liked their synagogue worship *experience*. They liked the prophets who created their own messages, which God called false prophecy. They loved the positive and uplifting messages. They loved the lies. Notice that God said, "My people love it so."

Ezekiel's ministry overlapped Jeremiah's ministry and he wrote that the people loved the wonderful messages and then they ignored the prophet's warning.

They come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people and hear your words, but they do not do them, for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain. Behold, you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear your words but they do not practice them. So when it comes to pass — as surely it will — then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst. Ezekiel 33:31-33 (NASB)

The people were thrilled with their synagogue experience. The people loved the priests who created their own religious rules about worship and how to be righteous. The message is a sad one. Many believers are not very discerning. They will believe almost anything when they respect the personality in the pulpit. The result is as Hosea wrote, "like people, like priest" (Hosea 4:9).

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
Because you have rejected knowledge,
I also will reject you from being My priest.
Since you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children.
Hosea 4:6 (NASB)

The same is true today in some churches. The people may cheer, clap and amen the message but God is not pleased.

ERRORS IN APPLICATION CENTERED PREACHING. Some pastors complain that so many in their congregation are spiritually immature, but often that is the pastor's fault. The people are simply following a pastor whom they have grown to admire and like and they have become just like him (Hosea 4:9). In many churches today the words that God wrote are often ignored because the priority of the pastor is not to explain what God wrote but to use it as a springboard to urge the congregation to some action about which the pastor feels deeply. His favorite hobby-horses are repeatedly preached. His application or call to action is often biblical or at least it sounds biblical. As a result, the pastor creates a series of topical messages which he believes are important for the church and he will work to emotionally urge the congregation to action.

One pastor announced that he had planned three months of topical sermons in one afternoon. He stated that he was so pleased that he accomplished it in a couple of hours. He had already determined the verses and the applications. But how could he know the application without first studying the verses or passages? Even though he had not seriously studied the passages and did not know the application that the passages actually taught, he knew the applications because his applications had already been predetermined. His goal was

to communicate his message - not God's message. Therefore, he selected passages that supported his viewpoint.

It is common that the message of a sermon is not supported by the passage actually selected because the pastor did not take the time to seriously study in order to determine the meaning of the passage. As a result, he is not aware or may not care that the meaning of the original language might have a different shade of meaning than what he read in his Bible. He may not be aware that his call to action is supported by a different Scripture and not the one he selected. In such cases, the pastor is teaching Scripture falsely, even if he did so unintentionally.

Even worse, some pastors intentionally search for a Bible version that has wording that supports their message and

as such we will incur a stricter judgment. James 3:1 (NASB)

DOCTRINE IS BORING TO MANY. Other pastors consider doctrine and any serious teaching of Scripture to be boring. Some believe such exposition is just academic and suitable only for the seminary classroom. Therefore, they dump God's carefully crafted words, sentences and chapters that the Holy Spirit moved the prophets to write (2 Peter 1:21) and substitute their own illustrations, stories, humorous jokes, graphics and videos so that the sermon "has life and spice." The Bible has become a source where one finds a list of spiritual or moral duties and principles. They believe their responsibility is to motivate the congregation to action accordingly. The words the Holy Spirit moved men to write

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then uses it. He rejects the translation from one Bible and selects a different rendering from another Bible because his goal is not to accurately communicate what God wrote but to find support for the message the pastor has preselected.

Consequently, what God wanted to communicate is not what the pastor claimed the passage said. He changed the meaning. Some in the church may think the message was wonderful and insightful and praise him later. But Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 12:32, Proverbs 30:5-6 and Jeremiah 26:2 warn us that God does not want us taking away or adding to His Word. When Scripture is taught in such a manner, His warning has been violated. The one who teaches this way is like the prophets that Jeremiah rebuked and to whom James 3:1 applies.

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that

are simply glossed over or ignored in favor of the pastor's own sense of moral duties he forgets about doctrine and discovering God.

One pastor stated that he did not like to teach theology because 1) it was boring and 2) the church was not educated enough to understand what he would teach. He said the church was too biblically illiterate. Sadly, his comment revealed that he found the Word of God to be boring and indirectly admitted that he was not a faithful pastor who taught the entire counsel of God. He should have spent time digging in the Word of God until the passage came alive and like Moses hungered to know God (Exodus 33:13-23). Then he would have had passion to communicate what the Holy Spirit wanted communicated. Then he would have been ready to preach and the people would have responded. When Scripture is boring to the pastor, what attitude should

we expect from the people in the church?

As a result, the pastor will not routinely teach through a book of the Bible because portions of it are boring to him and portions might be controversial or require too much study. Consequently, he will emphasize topical preaching – a passage here and a verse there. He will tend to preach passages that are familiar and light his fire! The systematic teaching of the books of the Bible that God wrote will not occur.

SKIM MILK IS FOR IMMATURE CHRISTIANS. Another preacher struggled with some in the church who had been Christians for many years but still acted like immature Christians. He felt that his congregation was not being transformed fast enough and believed that head knowledge was not the answer. So his 25-30 minute sermons were heavy on calls for a change in behavior. He criticized information

food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Hebrews 5:12-14 (NASB)

In this passage the Holy Spirit rebuked those who claimed to be Christians when He said, “You ought to be teachers.” He did not mean that they should have the spiritual gift of teaching. He meant that they should be able to teach the Bible to others. How many Christians know the Bible so that they can teach it to others? Does your congregation? Do you?

Then the Spirit rebuked them again and said, “You have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God.” The serious word is “again.” They had been taught the basics of the Christian faith but

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and emphasized transformation. His preaching style was to read a verse of Scripture, ignore the biblical text and concentrate on a series of personal illustrations that he used to support his call to action. This preaching style contained very little scripture and many *personal* illustrations, stories, humorous jokes and maybe graphics and Power Point charts. The Word of God should be the cream of the message, but this approach to preaching yields simply “skim-milk.”

Today, the Holy Spirit’s message of Hebrews 5:11-14 appears to have been forgotten. The book of Hebrews was written to people who had been Christians for some time but were immature. Hebrews 5:12-14 explains why they were immature.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid

they had gone backwards. It is clear from the passage that they had claimed to be Christians for a long time, but sadly they were on a spiritual diet of milk. In verse 13, the Spirit said they were infants. The Greek word infants is *nepios* and it refers to a toddler. The Spirit said that they were spiritual toddlers. But that was not always true. They had grown in their knowledge of the Scriptures. He said now someone needed to teach them the basic doctrines again. They had regressed backwards in their spiritual life. They had gone forward in their spiritual life and then gone backward. It is like someone trying to climb up an escalator that is going down. What happens when the person stops climbing up the down escalator? They start going backward. That is what happened to the Hebrews. This gives us the biblical principle that your spiritual diet determines if you are moving to maturity or sliding back to immaturity.

In verse 14, the Spirit adds that they should have been on

a diet of meat - the solid food of the Word, but they weren't. The benefit of a diet of meat is that a Christian will have "senses trained to discern good and evil." They will understand what is good and evil and how God wants them to live. Psalm 119 says,

Your word I have treasured in my heart,
That I may not sin against You.
Psalm 119:11 (NASB)

But how many Christians know the Word, not to mention have it memorized? This is why transformation is not occurring! When Christians know the Scriptures, transformation takes place. But many believers cannot teach the Word because they are still baby Christians. So many pulpits share the blame. The diet provided Sunday after Sunday in so

point about which to argue.

The Spirit was not interested in speculating about Melchizedek. The Spirit had a serious point to make about Jesus Christ, and Melchizedek would help Him teach that important truth. In response, the Holy Spirit rebuked them in Hebrews 5:11-6:19 for their immaturity. In fact, in the opening verses of the next chapter (Hebrews 6:1-4), the Spirit warns that they might not be Christians but unbelievers because of their lack of understanding of Scripture. They were not growing spiritually. Then in Hebrews 6:20, the Spirit starts discussing Melchizedek. He provided them with solid food or meat. He did not wean them off of milk onto meat. He just proceeded to give them meat.

The reason transformation is not occurring in the lives of many Christians is because pastors are feeding believers milk. The church simply hears a call to moral change largely

A PASTOR'S RESPONSIBILITY IS TO TEACH THE SERMON GOD WROTE.

many churches is skim-milk. Hosea 4:6-9 captures the problem well - "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." Pastors need to provide milk new believers and steak for the rest of their congregation. Teach all of the Word of God!

The message of Hebrews 5:11-14 is that the meat of the Word of God is the foundation for righteous living. The Holy Spirit will use the Scriptures to convict of sin and as believers respond, they will mature.

MEAT FOR MATURE CHRISTIANS. But what is the meat of the Word of God? The answer is found in Hebrews 5:10-11. The Holy Spirit states in verse 10 that He wanted to teach about Melchizedek, but in verse 11 He said that they were dull of hearing or lazy. Therefore, it would be difficult to teach them. The Spirit wanted to teach an important truth about Melchizedek. It was solid food or meat, but they were not ready for it. Many Christians today find any discussion of Melchizedek to be either boring or just a curiosity

devoid of God's message! A call to transformation has replaced the systematic teaching of the Word of God verse-by-verse. A regular diet of topical teaching has replaced the systematic book-by-book, chapter-by-chapter, verse-by-verse teaching of Scripture. A diet of milk has replaced a diet of meat.

HERE IS GOD'S TEACHING STYLE. Scripture is God's sermon. God communicated His message to the prophets and apostles who then recorded His words for us! One can see how carefully God wrote His sermons. For example, in Galatians 3:16 the apostle Paul drew our attention to the fact that God had said "seed" rather than "seeds" in Genesis 22:17-18. That is, God was concerned the word *seed* was written in the singular and not in the plural. That shows God was careful in what He had written.

We should ask why did God the Holy Spirit give us thirty-seven chapters in the book of Job before He reached His

conclusion in chapters thirty-eight to forty-two? Why did the Spirit make us wait so long to get to the conclusion? It seems to some that most of the chapters could be skipped in order to get to the *good part* or to the main points. But God did not agree. He included all those chapters.

What have some missed who skip those middle chapters? They missed the discussion between Job and his bad counselors. Anyone who carefully reads the entire book of Job discovers the counselors were not wise and they will discover the powerful conclusion that reveals the incredible character of God. God included all forty-two chapters of Job for a reason. The middle chapters are the buildup to the conclusion which is the application. The pastor who ignores chapters three through thirty-seven does not stop to realize that God included those chapters because He wanted them

written by the Holy Spirit. The logical flow of the development of theology arguing for the call to action is ignored. Pastors often jump to the application section and pound their application for 25 minutes, but the principles that argue for the call to action are found in the doctrine section. That is why the Spirit developed the doctrine section in Romans 1-11, and then in Romans 12:1 the Spirit moved Paul to write, “Therefore . . .” Then a series of applications follow.

Yet, many teachers and pastors minimize the “information” or doctrine and emphasize positive application. But that is not God’s teaching style. The foundation that God included in Scripture is what gives power to His application. Scripture contains the logical development of God’s sermons, complete with illustrations, Old Testament quotes

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taught. They are part of God’s sermon in Job. Some pastors have removed what they consider to be the “dry” places in Scripture for application! Maybe all that they taught was one chapter or a short passage. They just edited God’s sermon. They thought they improved God’s message!

Have you ever examined Scripture to see how God teaches and calls us to action? God actually presents a great deal of information before He calls us to action. Consider the book of Romans. Romans 1-11 is all doctrine. These chapters provide us an expanded explanation of the doctrine of salvation. In contrast John 3:16 is a one verse summary. Romans 11:33-41 concludes the doctrine section and then in Romans 12:1 the Holy Spirit calls the reader to a series of biblical actions. Romans 12-16 is the application section of the book of Romans.

But most pulpits rarely teach the books of the Bible as

and calls to action. Why not teach God’s sermons?

Those who ignore the careful argument that the Spirit developed and the words He wrote are like the prophets and priests in Jeremiah. Sadly, their style of preaching is called “teaching the Bible,” but they are not teaching the Bible. Congregations have grown accustomed to believing that they are being taught the Bible, but they are simply hearing sermons filled with calls to moral behavior.

CONCLUSION. If you are a pastor, when was the last time that you spent 20-30 hours pouring over the context of a passage of Scripture, trying to understand why the passage was written and its logical flow? Why did God organize it the way He did and what is the actual application of the passage? If you take time to pour over it, you will find nuggets of gold. What you discover in your study is what you should teach. A pastor’s responsibility is to teach the sermon God

wrote.

If you are a Christian, you should examine the spiritual diet you are being fed. Is your diet spiritual milk or meat? The mark of a mature Christian is that he or she is able to teach the Bible to others and is able to discern good from evil (Hebrews 5:12-14). Does that describe you?

Every Christian who desires to grow spiritually should seek a church that teaches the Bible book-by-book, chapter-by-chapter and verse-by-verse. You should want to be taught the meat of the Word and not just drink milk. That is the only way to grow spiritually.

As you learn more and more you will learn to discern good and evil. You will also learn more about God. In John 2:12-14 we are told that the spiritual young man is one who is having victory over sin, is strong in the faith and knows the Word of God. The spiritual father in the faith is one who knows God. The goal of every Christian should be to learn all that God has written for by it he or she will grow in the faith and the knowledge of our God. He wrote the entire Bible. He wrote the entire Bible. It contains what He wants you to know. Who are we as mere mortals to conclude that all of it is not important?