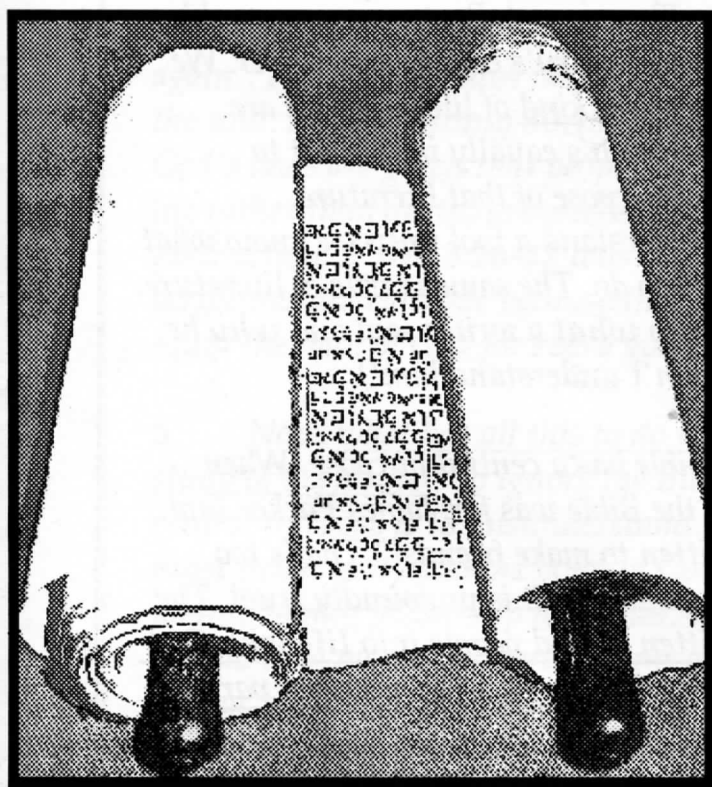


LISTENING TO GOD



AN APPROACH TO BIBLE STUDY

Part Five Of A Series Of Seven

5. What Counts Most?

SHAKESPEARE WASN'T WRITTEN
TO TEACH US GEOGRAPHY

RECOGNISE THE BIBLE'S
CENTRAL PURPOSE

1. To study Shakespeare as a way to learn geography is to waste your time and miss Shakespeare. To approach Poetry as you would Math is to miss poetry's beauty and power. We must recognise the kind of literature we are dealing with and it's equally important to recognise the purpose of that literature. (We don't understand a tool until we know what it is designed to do. The same is true of literature. Until we know *what* a writer said and *why* he said it, we don't understand him!)
2. The Bible has a central purpose. When asked what the Bible was for, James Packer said: "It was written to make friends!" That's too simple, of course, but it is profoundly true! The Bible is written to lead people into life with God through Jesus Christ. This life involves pardon from sin and devotion to the Saviour! The Bible's central aim is unashamedly religious. It's goal is to produce and sustain faith in God through Jesus Christ so that people might return to and remain with God!
3. The following verses (from among many) tell us plainly why the word of God is given to Man. Please be sure to read them!

IT IS BREAD—TO BE EATEN
RATHER THAN SIMPLY ANALYSED

4. There is **2 Tim 3:15** which tells us the Scriptures make us wise unto salvation. **John 20:30-31** says the Book was written that people might have eternal life through trusting in Jesus Christ. **1 Peter 1:23,25** says that the word was preached so people could be 'born again'. **Psalm 19:7** says the scriptures revive the soul. **Deuteronomy 30:15-16** teaches that God's laws are given that people might have life rather than death, prosperity rather than destruction. **2 Tim 3:16-17** tells us that the scriptures are valuable because they thoroughly equip the man of God for every good work!
5. Now, what has all this to do with the study of Scripture? To ignore the Bible's central purpose is to misunderstand it! We must listen to it as to the voice of God calling us into loving fellowship with him. We are not to read it as mere observers of some ancient drama, we are to recognise our place in the ongoing drama. We are to recognise its history as Man's history, and ours in particular. If we fail (and we could!), to hear the voice of God in the Bible, calling us and challenging us, we have missed the Bible's message and purpose. It is 'bread'—to be eaten rather than simply analysed! To be fed on, more than to undergo constant inspection!

**IT IS A TRAGEDY BEYOND WORDS
TO STUDY THE BIBLE...**

6. ***And the Bible is not a substitute for God!*** To confuse a love letter from our husband or wife with our husband or wife is to violate the purpose of the letter. The love letter is not intended to come between the two lovers. Its aim is to bring the two persons closer together. To substitute the letter for the person is a fundamental error. To confuse God's covenantal law or his message of Good News with God himself is to err at the most crucial level. We must study the Scriptures with open hearts, seeking his friendship. It is a tragedy beyond words to search the Scriptures and miss God (see **John 5:39-40**).

COME TO TERMS WITH JESUS CHRIST

7. The central purpose of the Bible is to bring us to life with God and that life is found only in Jesus Christ. Because this is so, he is the central character in God's purpose. **Therefore**, how we stand in relation to Jesus Christ is the issue which must be understood and settled before any other question is given serious

8. Our Bible study should begin with the New Testament scriptures. With those which deal most directly with God's liberating work

**BEGIN YOUR STUDY IN THE NT,
ESPECIALLY THE GOSPELS AND ACTS
consideration.**

in Jesus Christ and how God wants us to respond to it. We must begin with him and not in the Old Testament. In olden times, says the New Testament (**Hebrews 1:1-2**), God spoke to the ancients in "fragmentary and varied fashion". In Jesus Christ he has spoken in a final and completed way. God's fullest and clearest revelation has been made in Jesus Christ and that is why he must be the centre and focus of our Bible Study. Read **John 14:6**, **Acts 4:12** and **1 Timothy 2:5** on all this.

9. Begin your study, then, in the New Testament. Especially the GOSPELS and ACTS. Don't neglect the NT EPISTLES for they help us immeasurably to understand the GOSPELS. And don't completely avoid the Old Testament. But, in the beginning, make the GOSPELS and ACTS the centre around which your studies revolve. And do so with a view to finding freedom and life with God in Jesus Christ. **This** is the grand purpose for Bible study!

**RECOGNISE THAT SOME TRUTHS
ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN OTHERS**

10. All truths are important but some are more important than others. The Bible itself

**IF WE KEEP THIS IN MIND WE WILL
GIVE SPECIAL ATTENTION...**

confirms what commonsense tells us. Here are just a few verses which make this truth clear.

11. **1 Corinthians 15:3-4** where Paul said some things were "of first importance".

Matthew 23:23 where Jesus rebuked people for neglecting "the more important matters" of the law.

Matthew 5:19 and **22:38** where Jesus speaks of "the least" and "the greatest" commandments.

1 Samuel 15:22-23 where the prophet insists that the Lord delights more in obedience than in the offering of religious sacrifices.

12. *These scriptures say some things mean more to God than others, some truths are more important than others. If we keep this in mind we will give special attention to the more important matters. We will not spend a great deal of time on little questions when major issues stare us in the face. We won't spend a lot of time on obscure verses when plain words demand a response from us. We will gladly tolerate differences on minor issues but we will stand firmly on foundational truths.*

**TREAT NO TRUTH AS UNIMPORTANT
BUT FOLLOW THE BIBLE...**

13. *As you gain experience you will be able to distinguish more easily between what matters tremendously and what does not, between what is essential truth and what there can be room for honest differences on.*

14. *Does the Bible link the subject with salvation or forgiveness? Does it link the subject to life in Christ? Is the topic related to faithfulness to God and our neighbour? Does it seriously affect the 'truth of the Gospel' or how we view an honourable life before God? If it does, the subject is fundamentally important. Learn well the things that are plainly stated, obey the things that are plainly called for and remain open to receive the rest as you continue to gain more experience. Treat no truth as unimportant but follow the Bible when it teaches that some matters "are more important" than others (**Matt 23:23** and **1 Corinthians 15:3-4**).*

15. **Summary: 1)** To understand the Bible we must understand its nature and purpose! **2)** Its central purpose is to bring us life with God! **3)** Christ brings us life with God so we must make him the centre of our thoughts! **4)** Our study must centre around the GOSPELS and ACTS! **5)** Some truths are more important than others!

EVALUATION SHEET

Name: _____

Listening To God LESSON 5

Tick The Box When You Have Read The Entire Lesson

Respond To These Questions In Light Of Paragraphs 7-9 & 15

1. Why must we make Christ the centre of our study?

2. Why should we centre our study around the GOSPELS and ACTS? _____

Circle The Correct Scripture

1. Jesus spoke of "more important" matters of the law:

1 Corinthians 15:3 Matthew 5:19 Matthew 23:23

2. No one comes to the Father except through Christ:

Matthew 22:38 Acts 4:12 John 14:6

3. Scripture was written that men might have life eternal:

1 Samuel 15:22-23 John 20:30-31 1 Peter 1:23,25

4. We can study Scripture and miss Jesus Christ:

1 Timothy 2:5 John 5:39-40 Hebrews 1:1-2

Match The Scripture With The Statement

(Write the number beside the statement)

- ___ God is looking for obedience!
- ___ God wants to make friends in Christ!
- ___ Some truths are more important than others!
- ___ God's laws are meant to bring life and prosperity!
- ___ The OT gives an incomplete message from God!

1. Hebrews 1:1-2
2. 2 Corinthians 5:19
3. Deuteronomy 30:15-16
4. Matthew 23:23
5. 1 Samuel 15:22-23

Say Something About The Bible Not Being A Substitute For God
