

On Reading the Bible

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Reading the Bible is perhaps the most important activity of all Christians as Christians. For reading the Bible is at least the only visible sign that we are Christians, for neither prayers nor good works distinguish us Christians from other (religious) people. This is not to say that prayers and good works are not important among Christians. This is to say, rather, that reading the Bible fills them with God's love and Jesus' joy. And so reading the bible is the base, the substance, and the support of both Christian prayers and Christianly good works.

Sadly, very few church workers—whether pastors, teachers, or counselors—read the Bible in the above manner, precisely because they think they are so familiar with the Bible. Familiarity breeds negligence if not contempt. They read newspapers, commentaries, and about pastoral counseling, but not for the sake of appreciating the Bible. No wonder they often lack power and vital freshness; they are often burnt out. For all prayers and all works of love depend on reading the Bible. Without reading the Bible, no prayer works, no good work works.

How should we read the Bible? Well, what do we mean by reading? Several kinds and levels of reading are possible. Reading for information is one, as in reading the newspaper. Reading for clues to business is another, such as in reading the Wall Street report. Reading intently the instruction at the testing center is yet another. But poring over an important love letter, reading between and behind the lines, is quite a different reading from all else. It is the last manner of reading that we mean by reading the Bible. To read the Bible means to read it because our life depends on it. We cannot live without reading the Bible; we live for the sake of reading the Bible. A day without reading the Bible is the day not worth living.

Sadly very few people read the Bible, I mean, read the bible so intently as to have their lives depend on its reading. For everything that we do, and all that we are, begin at reading the Bible. Everything in life gets its true bearing, replenishment, and fulfillment from reading the Bible. In fact, reading the Bible is our riches, our joy, our very life. We live and we die for the sake of reading the Bible.

But why is reading the Bible so vitally crucial for us? Well, what is the Bible? With this question we touch the nerve of this essay. What the Bible is can be described in two ways, in the light of which how to read the bible is respectively explained with concrete examples: The Bible is God's love letter, and so we must appreciate it from the bottom of our hearts and with the entirety of our minds and souls (Section A). The Bible is also God's love food, and so we must take it and eat it, to let it become the flesh of our entire flesh and the bone of our inner bones (Section

B). But why does the Bible have such a power? Because it is made of God's love.

The "Love" here is very special; it can mean the power that lets be, that power that begets all things, the power that is sheng sheng pu hsi (unceasingly birthing). Without this love power of creation, this natura naturans (the nature-power that brings about nature), nothing can come to be as it is. In fact, the word "nature" is what is nascent, born.

I touch and feel my own heart. It pumps blood and nurtures all over me. It is this creative power, our pulsating heart beats, that makes us live as we do now. And I see twigs swing and quiver at the throbbing bloodstream of nascence and renaissance, constantly birthing, nourishing, natural things as they are. That is the power of nature. Love is this basic natural power that shapes and sustains us; to lose love is to have our life shaken at the base, shattered to pieces. This basic love is indeed "one thing needful" for our living as we are.

All in all, then, the Bible is God's clearest communication to us—as His love letter, as His love food—of His Love. And God's love is the power which lets us be, and for which we live. To read the Bible is to receive this creative Love to Live truly. Thus the Bible tells of God's love; our very existence depends on God's love; therefore our life depends on reading the Bible. We live for the sake of reading the Bible.

Now that the importance of reading the Bible is thus established, we are in a position to consider the reading of the Bible as God's love letter (in section A) and as God's love food (in section B).