

# The Beautiful Simplicity of God's Word

---

The Bible; the world's most numerous book and yet one of the least understood and, in many cases, unread books! The Bible is feared by some and revered by many. But what is it about the Bible that makes it such a popular yet misunderstood book? I hope that by the end of this article you will understand a little bit more about the Bible and be encouraged to pick it up and read the words within it.

The Bible is a collection of books, sixty six in all. It was written over many centuries (1500 years) by over forty different writers, some known, some unknown, but all inspired by God. The Catholic Bible actually contains seven extra books (Tobit, Judith, Sirach, Baruch, Wisdom and 1 & 2 Maccabees) but it still contains all sixty six books that are in the more mainstream versions. Despite the duration of time and the number of individual writers, the message, themes and truth remain consistent.

The Bible is split into two parts; the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament comprises of 39 individual books and the New Testament contains 27 books. An easy way to remember the number of books in each Testament is to count the letters in each word. "Old" contains three letters, "testament" contains nine. Put them together and we get 39. For the New Testament do the same thing only now instead of just putting them together as before but remember the cross! The New Testament has  $3 \times 9 = 27$  books. The Old Testament is really a history of the Jewish people and is, according to 2 Timothy 3:6 "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, for teaching." (NIV) The New Testament covers the life of Jesus, the establishment and encouragement of the early Christian church and a prophecy about the future days.

The most important point about the Bible is that is God's instruction book on how He wants us to live our lives. Like any instruction book it is only going to help if we open it up and read it! Before we go much further, and to demonstrate the awesome nature of God's Word I would like to present some facts about the Bible that will, hopefully, provide you with a quick reference on life. The shortest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 117. The longest chapter is Psalm 119. Sandwiched between is, obviously, Psalm 118. Now the center of the Bible is actually in Psalm 118! It is verse 8 to be exact. Psalm 118:8 should give as a perfect reminder on life and bring us comfort. It reads "*It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man.*" (NKJV) Coincidence? I think not.

The Bible was the first book that was printed on a printing press and has survived many attempts to have it obliterated from the earth. Many recent archeological discoveries prove the truth of the words of the Bible. Many of the truths that were previously 'in doubt' historically are now being confirmed scientifically. For example the city of Ur where Abram (Abraham) lived according to Genesis 11:31 was never known to have existed other than in the Bible until recent archeological digging uncovered it's ruins. Its temples, houses and the tombs of its kings and queens have now been unearthed.

In order to really understand the Bible I encourage you to get a version of the Bible that is written in such a way that you can enjoy and read it with understanding. Versions with “Thee” and “Thou” are really like following a foreign language these days and are more likely to turn you away from reading and enjoying God’s Word. Your grandparent’s copy of the Bible may be an heirloom but it also may not be the easiest version to understand! Be sure, though, that you get an authorized version of the Bible that has been accurately translated from the earliest possible manuscripts. I recommend either a New King James Version (NKJV) or, better yet, the New International Version (NIV). In my own studies I find that having at least two different translations to be of most benefit. Different ‘spins’ are usually placed on certain passages or phrases. This is especially true of non-mainstream versions of the Bible. A concordance is very helpful too although many Bible will have a short concordance within them. Study Bibles are also a valuable asset as are commentaries, however, do not take their understanding as always being correct. Remember that we are instructed in 1 John 4:1 to “test the spirits” it reads “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (NKJV) Commentaries merely give an individual’s view point, they are prone to personal interpretations.

Too many people enter into Bible study with the sole purpose of trying to prove or disprove a particular passage or ideal. They are probably looking too closely. It is rather like being too absorbed in checking each and every individual stitch on a tapestry to benefit from the beauty of the whole work. Jesus Himself tells us in Matthew 18:3 “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (NIV) What we are supposed to do is trust and believe as little children do with their parents. Most little children are taught rules and morals in their early years, usually from their parents, grandparents or guardians. They follow these rules without question. It is only when we get older that we begin to question or doubt. Jesus wants us to follow God’s instructions as if we were a little child, in other words, unquestioningly. Total obedience is required. But obedience to what? In order to answer this question we must return to what the purposes are for the Testaments.

The two Testaments of the Bible represent the pre and post Jesus laws of God. A Testament is a set of rules, laws, and instructions that someone is required to fulfill in order to obtain a promised reward. Testaments are usually associated with Wills and are used in legal circles as legal “truths”. The New Testament is the new rules, laws, and instructions instituted by Jesus. The Old Testament is the old laws, rules and instructions handed down, by God, to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:1-17) for the Jewish nation. It was given to Moses during the exodus from Egypt. Jesus lived under the laws of the Old Testament, but gave us the New Testament that was to take effect after His death. Jesus lived in perfect obedience to the laws of the Old Testament. Note that the Old Testament laws only ever applied to the Jewish nation (and their households, slaves etc.) It never was a global Testament. Today believing Christians are under the New Testament laws. If we aren’t then Christ’s death was in vain. The Testaments were written with specific purposes in mind. The Old Testament is a history of the Jewish people. The Torah (or Law) is contained in the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). This is also known as the Pentateuch. Remember that this was given only to the Jewish nation. Some people erroneously refer back to the Old Testament law in order

to justify how they believe that we should behave today. This simply cannot be a valid method because if we try to enforce one item of the old law then we must certainly follow all of it. If we did that then we would have to stone anyone to death who worked on a Saturday (The Old Testament Sabbath). In fact the Old Testament never applied to non-Jewish people anyway. The Old Testament laws required the blood sacrifice of animals as atonement for sins. This was done at least once a year, on the Day of Atonement. Obviously this is no longer the case but why? The answer is because Jesus made the ultimate blood sacrifice when He died on the cross for our sins. His death also ushered in a new and universal set of laws, rules and commandments...the New Testament. This New Testament (or covenant) is applicable to all nations, Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 3:6). Hebrews 8:13 tells us that the New Covenant replaces the Old. It reads "By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear." (NIV) The Old Testament was replaced, not because it was 'faulty' but because man was (and still is). (Hebrews 8:8). So since we are under the New Law it is pretty important, if not vital, that we understand what is expected of us by that Law. As a quick tip all but one of the original Ten Commandments are reinforced in the New Testament. The New Covenant is the Good News contained in the Gospels. The Gospels (the first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John)) give us hope (Colossians 1:23), it gives us life (2 Timothy 1:10), calls us to Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:14), saves us (1 Corinthians 15:2) and all this should bring us peace (Ephesians 6:15). The peace spoken about here is internal (inner) peace, peace of mind. The peace that comes from the full assurance of God's Promise if we trust, follow and obey. The message is simple and pure, but that doesn't mean that it is easy or trouble-free.

Jesus tells us that the most important instruction, the greatest commandment "Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind'. This is *the* first and great commandment" (Matthew 22:37-38). (NKJV) Then He goes on to give us the second greatest commandment "And *the* second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:39-40) (NKJV) Let us reflect on this a little bit. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind". That is easy right? "I love God" there, that was easy, except that saying it and doing it are two entirely different things! Let me put it this way. Whatever keeps you from doing or keeping God's Word is going to show where God stands in your heart. If you would forsake worshipping God to go fishing, sailing or golfing, then you love fishing, sailing or golfing more than you love God. Don't make the mistake of assuming that God will understand and as He only wants us to be happy as throughout the Old Testament we see what happened to those who worshipped other gods. God Himself tells us that He is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5, Joshua 24:19). God wants us to serve and worship Him. In fact if we make it to heaven that is what we will be doing for eternity (Revelation 7:15).

The second greatest commandment is to love others as yourself or to paraphrase by using the "Golden Rule"; "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." This one is a real challenge! It calls for us to really think of how we interact and react to everyone that we encounter, the server who forgets something you ordered, the policeman writing you a ticket, the person jumping line at the airport, the driver who cut you off, everyone! We are instructed to treat them with love. (Romans 12:9-10) "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to

one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;" (NKJV) Of course this doesn't mean that they will do likewise, but we should still treat them as we would like to be treated.

The message of the Gospel is indeed beautifully simple and can be summed up in just three words; Faith, Hope, Love. (1 Corinthians 13:13). The great and beautiful love chapter in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 is often read to couples as they get joined in matrimony, but is really isn't just a passage of instructions for newlyweds. It is a passage for everyone to try and live by. Read the passage and everywhere you see the word "love" substitute the word "God". We can confidently do this because we are told in 1 John 4:8 that "God is love". Now as Jesus is also God (John 1:1) and we are told to have the same mindset (like minded) as Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:1-2) then we should be able to plug our names into the same passage (1 Corinthians 13:4-13). Try it. How did you measure up? Do you, with all you heart, believe that you hit every mark?

1 John 3:13 warns us that the world will hate Christians. Even under these conditions we are still instructed to "love our enemies" (Matthew 5:44). In 1 John 3:15 we are warned of the dangers of not doing so "Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him." (NIV) We are told where unrepentant murderers end up in Revelation 22:15!

Yes, the message is beautifully simple; we are to have faith, hope and love in our hearts and minds. Faith that never doubts, hope that never fades and love that knows no limits.

Faith, as defined in the faith chapter of Hebrews 11:1, is "... is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." (NIV, emphasis mine).

Hope is not the flimsy hope of wishful thinking but it is the confident expectation of God's promise of eternal life in heaven as a reward for our obedience to the Word. For in this hope we were saved. As Romans 8:24-25 tells us "For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance." (NKJV) This means that we do not ever give up the hope of eternal sonship with God but that we continue to keep that hope with us throughout our lives.

Love is what underpins it all. If "God is Love" and "Jesus is God" then when Jesus said "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" (John 14:6) (NKJV) then love is also the truth the way and the life. Easy to say but not so easy to do without practice, but we must do it.

Pray for the ability to love the unlovable, forgive the unforgivable and to trust God unquestioningly.