

PEOPLE OF THE BOOK
Psalm 119:105-112, Colossians 3:12-17

(Read Colossians 3:12-17)

Intro: Aaron Earls of Lifeway Research, an arm of the South Baptist Convention wrote a short piece entitled, **11 THINGS YOU THINK ARE IN THE BIBLE, BUT REALLY AREN'T**. It's very insightful and goes right to the heart of my talk today. Let me list them along with a few of Earls' comments and explanations:

1. An apple in the garden

While Western art has traditionally depicted the fruit Adam and Eve ate in the garden as an apple, the Bible is not that specific. Genesis 3:6 merely describes Eve eating some of the "fruit" and sharing it with Adam.

2. Three wise men

Once again, we find a specific drawn from limited information in the Bible and popularized by art. While we may sing "We Three Kings of Orient Are" at Christmas, the Bible only tells us that there were three gifts and more than one magi (Matthew 2:1-12).

3. A whale swallowed Jonah

Despite what Veggie Tales taught you, the Bible never says specifically it was a whale that swallowed the runaway prophet. Some translations of Jonah 1:17 use the word "whale," but the original language only says that God sent a "great fish" to take Jonah in the right direction. Earls adds, If a grouper can swallow a shark whole, I'm sure God could find a fish big enough for Jonah.

4. Money is the root of all evil

Close, but the frequently quoted phrase is missing a few important words. 1 Timothy 6:10 actually says that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.

5. This too shall pass

After being fired by the Chicago Bears, iconic football coach Mike Ditka told the gathered media that Scripture tells us "This too shall pass." Except that's not true.

It's likely that Ditka and others have gotten it confused with the phrase "it came to pass" that appears over 400 times in the King James Version or the sentiment from 2 Corinthians 4:17-18. At least, he didn't quote Gandalf and say he was quoting Jesus.

6. Cleanliness is next to godliness

Sure, the Old Testament contains lots of rules about ritual cleanliness, but this biblical-sounding proverb is nowhere to be found in Scripture.

7. God works in mysterious ways

It's one of those true-ish statements, but it's not a Bible verse. Sure, Scripture is full of God doing things in unusual (to us) ways.

Isaiah 55:8-9 reminds us that God's ways are different from ours. But no biblical prophet ever uttered those words.

8. Love the sinner. Hate the sin.

This one goes back a ways, but not quite to biblical times. In the 5th Century, Augustine wrote a line which translates roughly to "with love for mankind and hatred of sins."

Later, Ghandi, a practitioner of Hindiusm said, "hate the sin and not the sinner." Still, both loving sinners and hating sin are biblical (Matthew 5:43-44, Psalm 97:10).

9. Be in the world, but not of the world.

This one may surprise you, but that phrase is nowhere in the Bible. As much as you may think it's an exact quote from the Sermon on the Mount or another verse, it's not there. Parts of the sentiment are, however, expressed in various places in Scripture (John 15:19, John 17:14-15, Romans 12:1-2). Just don't try to find that word-for-word as a verse in your Bible.

10. God will not give you more than you can handle.

This is the result of some presumably well-meaning person trying to sum up 1 Corinthians 10:13 as a way of comforting a person going through a trial, but that's not what that verse or any other verse in the Bible teaches us.

11. God helps those who help themselves.

If I could pick one phrase to erase from the memories of every Christian, it would be this one. This falsely remembered Bible verse is a blatant contradiction to everything Scripture actually teaches us.

Where does the phrase actually come from? Variations are proverbial statements in ancient Greek tragedies. The Quran (13:11) has something similar. An English politician gave us the exact wording, which Benjamin Franklin quotes in Poor Richard's Almanac.

That was a list of things that are NOT in the Bible. Most (but not all) of them actually express Biblical principles but are not in the Bible. Now how about something that IS in the Bible but is used out of context and wrongly in order to perpetuate sin. An example of this was in World magazine back in March and began like this:

A young man dressed in pink holding a Planned Parenthood sign picked Michele Hendrickson out of the thousands in front of the Supreme Court building during the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C. "Are you a Christian?" he asked abruptly.

Hendrickson, then a regional coordinator for Students for Life, responded yes. The man shot back, "Well then, what do you have to say when your God supports abortion?" Then he quoted a psalm and Numbers 5:27. "He had them memorized," says Hendrickson.

She had heard the Numbers passage before. It describes what a man in ancient Israel should do if he suspects his wife has committed adultery but has no proof: Bring her to the priest, who will mix into water dust from the Tabernacle floor and tell her to drink the concoction. The man quoted what Hendrickson thinks was the 2011 New International Version (NIV) translation of the verse, which says if the woman has been unfaithful, the drink "will enter her, her abdomen will swell and her womb will miscarry."

The point of the article was how important accurate translation is. But it also points out important it is to know how the Bible can be misused. The Brethren in Christ have long been known as "People of the Book" because of our high view of scripture. This view is still reflected in the second of the 10 BIC Core Values which is, **Believing the Bible:** and reads, *We value the Bible as God's authoritative Word, study it together, and build our lives on its truth.* We have incorporated a similar value into our ABC Core Values which reads, *The Bible is our basis for faith and truth, and in it is found the formula for transformation.*

My point is that every Christ Follower MUST know what this book says!. It's essential.

Barna Research in conjunction with the AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY released their Five Key Findings in May entitle THE STATE OF THE BIBLE 2021 and I was encouraged to find that, by and large, use of the Bible and belief in the Bible is up in this age of COVID. It's funny how people turn to God and his Word when the going gets rough. The same thing happened after September 11, 2001. But just turning to the Bible in times of crisis will not help a Christ Follower when they are confronted by a person who is misusing Scripture to perpetuate evil, or when they simply need it for encouragement for themselves or others. We need to know what is in these pages. We need to truly be PEOPLE OF THE BOOK.

Let me read part of the text I read a bit ago to you again, *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.* Colossians 3:16. Let the word DWELL in you. That can't happen if the only scripture you encounter in a week's time is what you hear and read here at ABC on Sunday morning. You need to be in the word day in and day out. It's necessary for the living of these days more than ever before.

As I finish this talk that has been more of a talk than a sermon, let me reflect briefly on the 8 verses Sheila read from Psalm 119 in an effort to solidify my point.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Psalm 119:105

Two weeks ago we were on vacation to North Carolina. Instead of driving the entire way in one day, we stopped off at an Airbnb in Northern Virginia. It was a nice place, a restored barn in the middle of acres of vineyards. But there was one problem right off the bat – in a place, waaaaaay out in the country, that gave new definition to the concept of darkness – there were no lights on the outside of the building. And it being a barn, with various hazards on the ground, it was a bit dicey until we fired up our flashlights and found our way safely into the apartment. Kathy informed me that the owner cited her desire to fend off bugs as her reason for not providing lighting for guests. I wondered which would win in a toss-up between a lawsuit for a nasty face plant into concretes steps or swarm of annoying bugs? Nevertheless I was glad for my trusty flashlight to guide the way but felt sorry for anyone who was not similarly prepared.

Our culture these days is getting as dark as Loudon County, Virginia at night and we need the light of scripture more than ever. We need the word of God to light our way and direct our steps. A spiritual face plant is far less likely when we seek direction in the Bible.

I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules. Psalm 119:106

And later,

Accept my freewill offerings of praise, O Lord, and teach me your rules. Psalm 119:108

And again,

I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law. Psalm 119:109

Rules! Rules! Rules! We don't like rules. But we NEED rules. Dale hung new shades in the north wing late last week. If he had not used a rule and a level, they would not function well if at all. If there were not rules in basketball or football or baseball, or any sport, they would not be called sport any more – they would called chaos. Without driving rules, a trip from here to Hawkins could very well be taking our life in our hands.

God's rules are not the fancy of a fickle master but are for the good of his creation. They are for us! They are indeed righteous as verse 106 says. His Ten Commandments – which are rules, give us an outline for a relationship with him and with our fellow human beings. They are complete. And we can find them and other righteous rules here in the pages of this book. So we do well not to forget those rules. But how do we know them unless we spend time in those pages.

I am severely afflicted; give me life, O Lord, according to your word! Psalm 119:107

God promises us life in his word. This is the very essence of a quite familiar verse, *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* John 3:16. This world is, as I said, full of darkness. It is a struggle to walk in holiness. There will be times when any Christ Follower will be afflicted. It's not if, but when because being a Child of the Living God is swimming against the current of culture. But God promises life after that affliction. In Paul's words, *He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.* 1Thessalonians 5:24. It's a Promise – he keeps his promises.

The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts. Psalm 119:110

As I said, walking with Jesus in righteousness and holiness is going against the current of culture. We will encounter resistance. In fact, as this verse implies, and as we have witnessed more and more, even here in America, we will face outright hostility. But notice the confidence of the Psalmist – *I do not stray from your precepts.* Don't give in. Find confidence in the Word of God. Earlier in this same Psalm he confidently proclaims *How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.* Psalm 119:9. By the way it works for young women, and old men, and old women, and boys and girls. You just have to know the word.

Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart. Psalm 119:111

The word is time tested. We have, as Hebrews 12:1 points a *great cloud of witnesses* who have gone before us living joyfully by the word of God. They are our heritage. AND it can be the joy of our heart as well. The word brings wisdom, righteousness, peace, and joy to name just a few.

And finally,

I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end. Psalm 119:112

Let's make it our inclination to do the will and work of God forever to the end. We find that in these pages. The word of God doesn't change, no matter what society tries to tell us about making the Bible fit society rather than the other way around. Jesus said, *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.* Mark 13:31. And Peter wrote, *But the word of the Lord remains forever. And this word is the good news that was preached to you.* 1 Peter 1:25. Be forever inclined to be people of the Book. All you need is here.

Conclusion: All this to say – WE NEED TO SPEND A LOT MORE TIME IN THE WORD OF GOD ABC! It's crucial. And there are simple ways to do that. Before you do ANYTHING, breath a short prayer for the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to what you find in the word and then here are some ideas:

For every 15 minutes you spend on Facebook, spend one minute reading the Bible. For every hour you spend surfing the web, spend five minutes reading the Bible. For every two hours you spend binging on TV shows spend ten minutes reading the Bible. These seem like trade-offs when you compare the amount of time in the word and in some other far less important activity – but I guarantee that once you begin reading, it won't stay to just a minute or five or ten. As you read with a mind to know what God is saying to you in his word, you want more.

If you struggle with reading, by a CD Bible or a computer or smart phone Bible app that has an audible capability and listen to the word. There are wonderful through the Bible programs that are both written or audible that take you systematically through the Bible in 6 months or a year or two years or more. Make it suit you, but for the sake of your soul and for the good of the Kingdom, get into the Word.

Find a devotional program the takes you through the Bible. They are set up to take just a few minutes to more extensive expenditures of time.

That's enough for a start a becoming more and more a PEOPLE OF THE BOOK.

Amen.