

Coping With the Plague of Biblical Ignorance

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Introduction

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I also will forget thy children (Hos. 4:6).

Such is the awful assessment of the ignorance of God's people in the 8th century BC. Plainly, God was displeased with his people in the Old Testament because of their ignorance of His Word. If ignorance of God's Law was inexcusable in a day when there was no way to mass-produce it and circulate it among the people except by public reading, how much more inexcusable is ignorance among us with our multiple copies of the Bible in our homes and the many opportunities to hear it preached and taught?

Time was, in previous generations, when we were known as a "Bible-totin', Bible-quotin'" people by our neighbors and friends. Now we can't even get our brethren to bring their Bibles to classes and worship. At one time, we had the reputation of being able to find the Scripture needed if we could not quote it. Now, many of the saints know less about the Bible than their sinner friends. Surely, there is evidence aplenty to indicate that we no longer deserve being called a Bible-knowing people generally.

In saying these things, I do not have in mind the babes in Christ who have had little time to learn. I am speaking of those who have been members of the body for a decade, or two, or three, or four and still have hardly even a vague concept of what the Bible says specifically or (in some cases) teaches generally.

Why are we so timid about talking to our friends about Christ, the Gospel, and the church? More than anything else, I believe it is because we feel insecure and inadequate in our knowledge of God's Word. A few years ago, I took a survey in a Bible class, asking where the key verses on the plan of salvation are found. While many in the class knew what the plan of salvation was, not even the elders of that church could tell where to find them.

If you wanted to look up the passage quoted in the first paragraph, would you look near the beginning, the middle, or the end of the Old Testament? Is the book of Hezekiah in the Old Testament or the New? Are you sure? Can you place Moses, Abraham, Joshua, David, and Noah in chronological sequence? Was Luke an apostle? How many New Testament books can you name? In order? "But," you say, "these things are not important." Perhaps not. But if we

know not these simple factual “unimportant” things, chances are good that we don't know many of the more important things. Please read Hebrews 5:12–6:1 (it's in the **New** Testament).

Why Such a Plague of Ignorance?

1. **We do not study like our spiritual forbears did.** We have become slaves to frenzied schedules. Parents and children alike are involved in so many **good** things we haven't time for the **best**. Our family members run in many directions, making it difficult to even assemble for a meal together. In those rare moments when everyone is at home, often we are offering up our devotions to our TV altars. Consequently, Bible school teachers are greeted by pupils (young and old) who have made no preparation, some of whom will cease to attend if strong encouragement to study is applied or homework is assigned. Along with our instant and effortless coffee and oatmeal, people want instant and effortless Bible study. Some would just as soon have none.
2. **Weak preaching has done its part.** Mind you, no one ever became learned in the Bible by listening to preaching alone, however strong it was. But our grasp of God's Word can be powerfully accelerated by strong Biblical preaching. The less people study at home the more they need strong preaching from the pulpit. Ironically, the people who need it the most have the least appetite for it.

Several years ago, the cry began to go up that our preaching had been “too hard,” “too doctrine-centered,” and “too tactless.” If that ever was the case, it certainly is not so now. Many of our preachers are so up to date that they know more about the fine art of ear-tickling than of sounding forth the clarion call of the saving and strengthening Gospel. Many “pew-sitters” have confused polite little twenty-minute talks that would be met with approval in any church building in town, with Gospel sermons. Some not only like such; they demand it. Preach the Bible to such people and you'll raise their ire. Say what you will about our preachers of yore (and many who are still like them today, thank God), their hearers knew more Bible after their sermons than before.

3. **The profusion of Bible versions is at least suspect.** I am not opposed to up-to-date and accurate Bible versions, and no Bible student should be. Excellent translations have been in circulation for generations, nixing any excuse for a constant stream of new ones — except financial profit from their publication. With the proliferation of versions has come a corresponding lack of distinction in men's minds about what is and what isn't Scripture. Often the most farfetched, subjective paraphrase is most readily adopted by the most ignorant person on the Bible. Rather than being a source of enlightenment, such volumes only compound ignorance of the true teachings of the Bible and mislead the uninformed reader. More about this subject later.

Consequences of Our Ignorance

If one remains totally ignorant of the Bible, so that he never learns its message of salvation, he will be lost eternally (Mark 16:15–16; 2 The. 1:8–9; et al.). Even those who learn enough

to obey the Gospel and do so, imperil their souls by choosing to remain in spiritual infancy. Biblical ignorance results in dire consequences:

1. **A teacher shortage in the churches** (Heb. 5:12). I am sure that the most frequent reason given for not teaching is, "I don't know enough." It is probably the truth in many cases. One can no more teach Bible than Biology without knowing the subject.
2. **Spiritual pygmyism** (Heb. 5:12-13). Biblical ignorance causes one to perpetually remain a spiritual baby. It is from these that most of the "bawling and squalling" is heard in local churches when "the whole counsel of God" is declared (Acts 20:27).
3. **Inability to "discern good and evil"** (Heb. 5:14). A person who cannot see the difference in worldly and Christian conduct is demonstrating his Biblical ignorance. A person who says, "there are no moral absolutes," shows his ignorance, for God says there are such things as "good" and "evil." A Christian who says he can see no harm in social drinking, dancing, or viewing obscene movies, and cannot distinguish between modest and immodest clothing often fails these matters through ignorance.
4. **Susceptibility to "every wind of doctrine"** (Eph. 4:13-15). Perhaps the church has felt the devastating curses of her ignorance at this point more than any other. The devil will never invent a false doctrine that the Holy Spirit has not anticipated and refuted in the Bible. However, this is all for naught if we don't know the Book. The old doctrines of Calvinism and the more recent waves of "holy-rollerism" have been exposed repeatedly by faithful preachers in public debates spanning centuries. Many among us think these doctrines are new because they are ignorant of the Bible and church history alike. Some are deliberately leading the church toward denominationalism; many are following because of their ignorance.

Overcoming Our Ignorance

How can we cure the great famine of Bible knowledge that is so prevalent among the saints? The following suggestions may be oversimplified, but I submit them for consideration:

1. **There must be a desire to learn more.** The Lord likely meant more, but surely, He included spiritual knowledge that produces righteousness when he promised, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled" (Mat. 5: 6). We will remain ignorant only if we are content to be. A great part of the cure lies in our priorities. If we view the concerns of the kingdom as an inane pastime, engaged in only two or three hours every Sunday, we guarantee our own spiritual malnutrition.
2. **Get a good, reputable version of the Bible, and stick with it.** I deeply respect the King James Version and some other versions have some strong points. The New King James Version (1979) is a faithful update of its original namesake. However, it is generally conceded by sound brethren that the American Standard Version (1901) is the closest thing to a literal, word-for-word English translation in existence. While it has some weaknesses, it probably has fewer than any other. I unhesitatingly recommend it. I use it in my private study and in the pulpit and classroom. Most "modern speech" versions are one-man efforts, resulting in many biased renderings (Williams is perhaps the safest of the lot). Also, remember that some

of these are not even translations, but paraphrases, making them biased commentaries, at best. The committee-produced volumes of the last several decades (e.g., The Revised Standard Version, The New International Version, The Easy-to-Read Version, et al.) are little better. They reflect Calvinistic, Premillennial, Pentecostal, and even skepticism errors held by various committee members. Further, beware of so-called “study Bibles,” the commentary notes of which are loaded with denominational poisons of various sorts. I recommend use of such books only comparatively with your basic version.

3. **Set aside a time each day to study and follow a system.** Here is one suggestion: Choose one book and devote your study time to it until you complete it. Use good commentaries, Bible dictionaries, atlases, a concordance, and other helps. Read everything you can on the book or subject, compiling a notebook on your research or making notes in your Bible’s margin. When you have done all you can on one subject or book, dig into another one. **Don’t neglect at least reading some portion of the Bible every day.**
4. **Faithfully attend all the Bible classes and worship periods.** Study your lesson before coming to class. If possible, outline the sermon as it is being preached. Take advantage of every special lecture series and Gospel meeting conducted by your home congregation and other faithful congregations in your area, for such will greatly enrich your knowledge. Enroll in a Bible correspondence course and try to enroll others.

We must use every opportunity to “. . . grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ...” (2 Pet. 3:18). Our own salvation and that of the world depends upon our efforts to this end.

[**Note:** I wrote this article for, and it was published in the May 1975, edition of *Christian Worker*, Bill Freeze, editor. I have since briefly updated it].

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