**How to grow as a Christian-“Feeding on God’s word.”**

1. Intro. The picture of ‘feeding on God’s word’ comes from Jesus’ rebuke to Satan in Matt. 4:4 “Man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” To live we need food both material and spiritual, so to ‘feed’ on God’s word means reading and absorbing it.

For the last 20 years I’ve had a strelitzia-it’s survived with about 4 or 5 leaves-no flowers, but last year I realized it was POTBOUND, so it’s in a bigger pot with fertilizer applied and it now has 13 leaves and, maybe, will flower! In a way this can be true of believers-I’ve been pot bound sometimes. There’s some life, but we’re not flourishing!

Rom. 12: 2 reminds us “Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of the world..” or “Don’t be squeezed into the world’s mould..” The “world’s pattern” or “mould” means that, outwardly, we may seem to be acting, as if we do not know God. Therefore, we need the challenge to “be transformed” from the inside “by the renewing of your mind..”, so that our reason and thinking faculties act according to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Then we can discriminate between good and evil and discern God’s will for us.

Hence our Sermon Series “How to grow as a Christian”, starting with ‘Worship and Fellowship’-praising God. ‘Prayer’-our requests as we obey God’s Will and, today, the input from ‘Feeding on God’s Word’-when we listen to what the Holy Spirit reveals to us in Scripture. All these will renew our minds, so that we will be “transformed” into greater Christlikeness, as we develop our friendship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lastly, the Scriptural input is more than Bible knowledge-like knowing the order of the Minor Prophets. It’s to do with following what the Holy Spirit teaches us. “Do not merely listen to the word…Do what it says. Anyone who listens but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently..(into the word)..continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it-he will be blessed…” Jas. 1: 22-25. How very true!!

1. What, therefore, is so special about the Scriptures?

1. In the gospel reading Jesus says to the Pharisees “These are the Scriptures that testify about me.” Jn. 5: 39. They point to Him as the Son of God, the Living word. In the same verse, He commends them for studying “the Scriptures diligently because you think that by them you possess eternal life”-which He explains covers not only life after death but what has been called ‘life at its best’. It’s a special sort of life-meaningful with a spiritual dimension, joy, forgiveness, grace and the sense of being loved by God. Jesus did say “I have come that they may have life and have it to the full” Jn. 10: 10, as well as “Now this is life eternal: that they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Jn. 17: 3. To know Jesus by faith is part of our friendship with him, which was the aspect of Christianity that struck me so powerfully, when I became a Christian.

When Jesus says “search diligently” He’s calling the Pharisees and us to understand what we read, to meditate on it and to ‘chew it over’ in our minds and hearts, BUT we must come to Him first for that. Sadly, the Pharisees would not do that-they would not accept Him and His offer of friendship by faith-they would not listen. All their study was fruitless-so sad!

2. In the Epistle-2 Tim. 3:14-17

a) Paul makes clear (v 16) that “All Scriptures are God breathed”-the word for’ breathed’ is the same as ‘the breath of life’ and the Holy Spirit-a creative force. Firstly, this means that the contents reflect the character of God-reveal His purposes to a greater or lesser extent. When one walks through a wood on a sunny day, there are patches where the trees are thick, so there is shade, whereas in more open places the light is bright. The same is true of the Scriptures- some parts blaze with God’s light, unlike other parts, which seem more opaque.

Secondly, the Scriptures contain 66 books-the word bible comes from the Greek Biblia meaning ‘books’. Each author is distinct with his own aim, tone, style and perspective. For instance, the four Gospels have different audiences in mind-Matthew writes for Jews, while Luke has the Gentiles more in his sights-their different perspectives makes the overall account of Jesus’ life and character much more rounded and three dimensional! It’s not like the Koran, which Muslims assert was dictated by God to Mohammed. Of course, there are apparent contradictions and difficulties, often to do with the exact meaning of Hebrew words, but, overall, there is a coherent revelation of God’s character and purposes from Genesis to Revelation.

Indeed, the Scriptures can be trusted. Jesus accepted them. So often, the Holy Spirit uses them to highlight some point that we should heed, so they are relevant today! They are described as ”living and active, sharper than any two edged sword” penetrating to “the dividing of soul and spirit.” Heb. 4:12 or again as “ the sword of the Spirit.” Eph. 6: 17.

b) Paul outlines specific uses for the Scriptures-firstly, teaching, where they can make “wise to salvation” v.15. They help us to grasp God’s mercy, the free gift of salvation and other aspects of how to live for Christ. These include the Lord’s “very great and precious promises”, for God has “given us everything (including the promises) we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him..” 2 Peter 1: 3-4. Or again, the Scriptures are “a lamp to our feet..and a light to our path.” Ps 119: 105. They can help to guide us on the next step or in the longer term.

Secondly, they can “rebuke” us (v.16) for an attitude in the past or the present-be it an unloving comment, deceit or feebleness. I recall Peter Farquhar telling me that he was erupting to a colleague at MGS about an idle pupil, when his friend said, in rebuke, ‘remember he, too, is made in God’s image’. The Scripture can “correct” us for the future, so that we improve our responses. Once I was sounding off about some trivial issue of School politics, when a Christian friend reminded me that we should “set our affections on things above..” Col. 3: 2.

Thirdly, they can be useful for “training in righteousness” (v.16)-help us to have the right relationship with God and others in our approach and conduct-so that “the man (and woman) of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” These might include showing sympathy for those who are struggling, the helpful word for the bereaved or the angry, offering help or prayer or even explaining, simply, the Good News. To conclude, if we are to grow as Christians, we need God’s word to make us “wise unto salvation…to rebuke and correct…and train (us) in righteousness.”

1. How, then, can we feed on God’s Word? Firstly, in general terms, sermons can help us or a Bible study group, where our contributions and those of others, as they give their ‘take on’ on verses or issues, can be so helpful. Secondly, on a personal level, we need to listen to God as we read a short passage of Scripture, preferably, on a systematic basis like the Scripture Union or the Bible Reading Fellowship provide. Their notes can help us to understand the passage-we need to pray that the Holy Spirit will show us what is important to grasp or that something will leap out at us. In an anxious time last week I was reminded to “LET the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.” I had to let that happen! We need to go beyond just reading and understanding to praying the lessons in and obeying. As Jesus said “ everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house upon the rock” ,so that despite “the rain.. and the winds…(beating) against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation upon the rock.” Matt. 7: 25.
2. If we want to develop our friendship with the Lord Jesus Christ so that we experience “eternal life”, where we are slowly transformed, we should read the Scriptures, which are “God breathed” and point to Jesus!