

- ***READ Hosea 4:1-6*** As with much of the writing of the Prophets, the message to the Jews from Hosea was one of judgement. In this particular section of the book, the prophet's condemnation of the people is a result of their lack of knowledge of God and His Law. For their lack of knowledge they would be rejected as God's priest and their children would be forgotten by God.
- We would hope that the condition of the people who claim God would be improved today, but sadly that isn't the case. According to an article by Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the spiritual knowledge of our country is sorely lacking. Researchers George Gallup and Jim Castelli put the problem this way, *"Americans revere the bible—but, by and large, they don't read it. And because they don't read it, they have become a nation of biblical illiterates."*
- Biblical illiterates? That might sound pretty harsh to us, but the research done by Gallup and the Barna Research Group seems to support this evaluation.
 - Fewer than half of adults can name the four Gospel accounts.
 - Many professed Christians cannot identify more than two or three of the Apostles.
 - According to 82% of Americans, *"God helps those who help themselves,"* is a Bible verse.
 - The majority of adults believe the Bible teaches that the greatest purpose in life is taking care of one's family.
 - At least 12% of adults believe Joan of Arc was Noah's wife.
 - Over 50% of graduating seniors believe that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife.
 - A considerable number of respondents to one particular poll believed the sermon on the mount was preached by Billy Graham.
 - 60% of Americans can't name even five of the ten commandments.
- As George Barna notes, *"No wonder people break the Ten Commandments all the time. They don't know what they are!"* His overall conclusion, *"Increasingly, America is biblically illiterate."* This is wherein the true issue resides. The problem isn't simply that Americans and Christians don't know enough Biblical facts to compete well in Bible trivia. The problem rests in the fact that Biblical illiteracy is a great growth killer because it hinders strong spiritual growth. This truth is put forth very well by Mr. Mohler when he says, *"We will not believe more than we know, and we will not live higher than our beliefs."*
- It used to be said of the members of the Lord's church that they were walking and talking Bibles because their basic Biblical knowledge was so strong and deep. Can that still be said today in 2018? I'm not sure if I can confirm that as being the case anymore, but that doesn't mean that we can't get back to that place where we are known as a people of the Book. In order to do that, however, we must acknowledge the presence of Biblical illiteracy, why it happens, what its consequences are, and what can be done to remedy this great problem.

I. Why does it happen?

A. apathy & misplaced priorities

1. People don't know the Bible because they simply don't care enough to know the Bible. As with any sort of academic or intellectual endeavor, knowing the Bible is going to take some time and hard work. With over 780,000 words contained within the Bible, there is no way one can become knowledgeable without putting in the time, and no one is going to put in that kind of time to know the Bible if they don't truly want to know it. Sadly, since so many do not want to know the Bible, they're not putting in the time and thus the epidemic of Biblical illiteracy.
2. But there are plenty of people who say that they do care about God and His Word. They say that they want to learn and grow in their Biblical knowledge...but the reason they don't know more than they know is because they simply don't have enough time. At least that is what those types of people tell themselves.

3. They lack in the Biblical literacy that they say they want and they blame it on time, and yet these same people are incredibly knowledgeable about other facets of life. They can tell you about all things pertaining to sports, academia of some sort, politics and the like, but that Bible that they claim to treasure...and that God that they claim to believe in...well they for some reason don't have much knowledge about them at all.
4. If ever there was a practical application that could be taken from **Matthew 6:19-21** besides that of avoiding materialism...this must be it! We say that we treasure God and His Word, but how much knowledge have we built up concerning the Word? If we look at our lives and we recognize that we don't know all that much about the Bible, and yet we know everything about other temporal aspects of life...then can we truly say that our heart can be found in the Lord? If we are being honest then we must recognize that we can say no such thing. If we don't care about God and His Word, or if we haven't arranged our lives in such a way that God and His Word are getting plenty of real attention and dedication then there is no way that we will be Biblically literate and in a position to establish and develop a strong and thriving faith.

B. postmodernism

1. The postmodern mindset can be simplified into the understanding that there is no real and absolute truth that must be understood and accepted. This type of mindset obviously stands in opposition to what the Bible claims about itself. In **Psalm 119:160**, the Psalmist records, *"The sum of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting."* Jesus further affirms the words of the Psalmist when He says in **John 17:17**, *"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."*
2. We see the Bible as being everlastingly beneficial for mankind and therefore worthy of our attention and learning, but that isn't how every sees it. Some people see the Bible as being antiquated or outdated, and while it might have been a good truth for people back when it was written, it is no longer useful for us in the 21st century.
3. Besides...who would want to willfully submit themselves to lots of rules that just restrict what you can do in your life? Why not just live your life the way you want to live it according to your own truth? You see, when this type of mindset is present and thriving in a society, a natural result is a bunch of people who see no need for and have no respect for the Scriptures. With this being our currently reality to a certain extent, it shouldn't surprise us that we are reaping the negative consequences of allowing Biblical illiteracy to take place in our world.

II. What are its consequences?

A. spiritual weakness

1. When people are ignorant towards the Bible and they have no real grasp over what God desires for them in their lives, why would we expect for them to be willing to stand strong for God's truths in a world where they will be pressured from every side to go against God's will? As Mohler notes in his article, why would we expect a society that thinks Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife to take a strong stance against homosexuality. Additionally, if we live in a society where many are ignorant to the understanding that all men are made in the image of God, then how can we expect for abortion and racism to be seen as evil? If we live in a society where marriage is not understood as being a divinely given institution, when why would we expect for society as a whole to respect God's will for mankind's marriages?
2. If men are ignorant to God's Word and will then why would they behave in any way besides according to their sinful fleshly desires, and this includes those of His Son's body. In fact, if we know God's Word then we know that this has been the case anytime men forget God. Just take a moment to consider **Hosea 4:1,2**. When God is forgotten...then His will is not followed and men will find themselves engaged in all sorts of evil and wickedness.

B. misunderstanding

1. Beyond just the basic spiritual weakness that comes from being Biblically malnourished, we must also consider that Biblically illiterate people still try to use the Bible at times and that only leads them falling into the proverbial ditch of misunderstanding. If we truly want to understand and comprehend God's Word then we must dig into the Word and extract it's truths.
2. We must be **II Timothy 2:15** type of people when it comes to our handling of God's Word. If we want to be people who accurately understand and handle it then we must be people who are giving attention to it's teachings and connecting the dots of Scripture. We cannot expect to be people who's faiths are firmly built upon the strong foundational principles of God's Word, particularly those found in **Ephesians 4:1-6**, if we are Biblically illiterate.
3. This is why we run up against so many people in the world that have a faulty understanding of God's Word. They think they have a grasp upon God's Word based solely upon some book or some preacher that they respect. They might read those books and listen to those men, but if they have never actually dug into the Book itself then they are no better off in reality because their understanding is only built upon the fallible teachings of men. Surely this only leads to the next stage of ditch finding where the blind are leading the blind. Yet this is not the end of the consequences of Biblical illiteracy because misunderstanding only leads to misapplication.

C. misapplication

1. When we don't understand God's Word properly then what we will quickly find are people who are using God's Word improperly. How often do we hear people around us try to use the Bible against Christians who had taken a stance against some sort of immorality? Take for instance something that I have seen numerous times when it comes to the topic of homosexuality, especially on social media discussions/debates/dumpster fires.
2. Someone will state their belief that marriage is only between a man and a woman and they will quote **Leviticus 18:22** as a supporting text. Someone will then turn around and start naming off other portions of the Law of Moses, and they will ask why those things aren't followed, as well. *"Do you eat shellfish? Do you eat pork? Do you where clothes of different fabrics?"* All of these questions are asked because under the Law these things were not permitted. Yet, we know, as people who understand how the Bible works, that we are not under those restrictions because our covenant with God is not that covenant. This whole conversation could almost be avoided if people would just explain Jesus's teachings on marriage in **Matthew 19**, but again that would require them having a firm grasp on the Bible as a whole. I truly hope we are getting the point that misunderstanding of the Bible that comes from Biblical illiteracy will only lead to further misapplications and problems. Yet, these things don't have to exist because there are some solid remedies for Biblical illiteracy!

III. How can it be remedied?

A. family devotional times

1. If we are wanting to help fix a societal problem such as Biblical illiteracy then we must begin in the bedrock of society and that is the home. Parents have the ability to change the direction in which society is going by leading their children in the ways of the Lord from an early age. We know well what Paul instructs fathers to do in respect to their leading of their children from **Ephesians 6:4**, *"Fathers, do no provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."* Solid advice from Paul, but he wasn't the first to say this.
2. In **Deuteronomy 6:1-9**, the Lord makes the recipe for national success very clear to Moses, and Moses then passes it along to the people. If they wanted to have prolonged days of success then they had to be busy teaching their kids to *"fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments."* (**Deuteronomy 6:2**) It really is that simple.

3. Does this mean that every single one of our kids is going to turn out to be strong faithful Christians? Obviously that is the hope and the goal, but the kids have a mind of their own and will do as they see fit. However, as parents we are only doing them a disservice when we don't put them in the best possible situation to be strong Christians by not having dedicated times to focus on spiritual things. If we allow them to grow up under our roofs without seeing spiritual things as the main focus then why would we expect for them to suddenly change once they leave and be better with their own families. If we want to break the cycle of Biblical illiteracy then we must begin by giving strong attention to the Bible in our homes. It's not just about living the Bible, but it is about opening it as a family and learning from it together.

B. Biblical emphasis in the church

1. But the home is only the beginning because we know that the church has a role to play in helping to building up the Biblical knowledge of its members. Churches must emphasize spiritual growth in knowledge, faith, and living. The church is not a social or recreation institution. It is solely a spiritual institution in which the Bible must be emphasized and focused upon because it is the truths of God's Word that will help us to be pleasing to God.
2. This is so clearly seen in **Ephesians 4:11-13**. The church is to build up the members of the body so that they are strong in faith and knowledge of the Son of God. How can we know Jesus unless we are committed to knowing His will in the Bible? The church much stress and emphasize Biblical consideration and teaching.
3. I was recently speaking with a woman who was sharing an experience her grandson had in attending a denominational church in this community. It was a service focused on young people and they were studying from Jonah, but the young man complained that he didn't need to hear about Jonah. He just wanted to hear about things that were applicable to his life as a young man. Sadly, I have heard that type of mentality from more people than just this young man, and it is an extremely poor mentality because it paints the Biblical narrative as not being applicable to our lives today. This couldn't be any further from the truth.
4. The stories within our Bibles are profitable for teaching! (**II Timothy 3:16**) If we want to learn about fleeing lust then consider the stories of Joseph and David. If we need to learn about suffering and how to deal with that then we need to read Job. Do we need some teaching on pride and arrogance? If so, then let's go read about king Saul. What about bad influences? Consider the mistakes of King Rehoboam in listening to his peers instead of the wise elders. Oh by the way...these are all from the Old Testament! If our young people are not seeing the value of plain Bible teaching then either we're not teaching all that well or they're just not wanting what God is offering us in the wisdom of His Word, and if that is the case then they will continue the pattern and cycle of Biblical illiteracy.

C. personal desire and responsibility

1. Really that is what it comes down to at the end of the day...we each have to have a personal desire within ourselves that motivates us to dig into the Word and learn from it what God is offering us. But again...this isn't about simply knowing the most facts or looking smart. Instead, our motivation must be a love for God and a longing desire to know Him better and to grow closer to Him as our faith in Him grows and develops.
2. We need to be a people who have the mindset of the Psalmist who penned **Psalms 119**. This entire Psalm is a dedication to God's Word and how much the godly man or woman ought to be devoted to it. *"I shall light in Your commandments, which I love; and I will meditate on Your statutes."* (**Psalms 119:47,48**) Maybe no other portion of this Psalm better captures what ought to be our mindset that **vv.97-104**. Do we truly love God's law? Do we love His Word? If we do then we will be dedicated to it, and it will not be said of us that we are Biblically illiterate because our love has moved us to know His Word and to ultimately know Him.

The judgement day will be a sad realization for so many Biblically illiterate people who did not know God's Word on earth and because of that they do not know the great God of heaven whom they are standing before in judgement. They will hate themselves for neglecting the knowledge of God and His Word because it will only result in their inability to know Him in heaven because condemnation will only be our portion for eternity. May this motivate us to be a people of the Book! May each of us be the type of people who are committed to God and His Word, and may that Biblical knowledge allow us to grow mightily and prevail in our faiths to the glory of God.

PRAYER *Our glorious Father in heaven. You are the Creator of the heavens and the earth. You are the author of our salvation and the one who lifts our heads when they hang low. You are the giver of every good blessing, and You are the one who hears our prayers. We know and are convinced of these things because they are found in Your Word, and we ask that you would help for us to be committed to Your Word always. We look around us and we see the damage caused by a lack of knowledge of You and Your Word, and we ask that you would help for us to be always diligent to focus on You and Your Will before all other things in this life. May we know Your Will to our very hearts, and may that lead us to serve you better each day. Please bless our shepherds as they seek to lead us closer to You, and may Your name be praised in our dedication to Your and Your Word. We thank You for the ability to lift up our voices to You, and we do it in the name of Your Son Jesus the Christ...amen.*