

Study, explore and incorporate Christ's teaching in our lives

We are Christians, which simply means we are followers of Christ. So it seems obvious that we would be people who would study, explore and incorporate his teachings. But what is “obvious” is not always done. For instance it is obvious that smoking is bad for one's health, but people still smoke. We also are separated from his life by over 2000 years, and so have only what has been recorded and written down by others. I often think that all Bibles should come with warning labels – danger inside, read at your own risk. There is a rabbinical tradition that parts of the Bible are not to be read by anyone under 30. The rabbis know that the Bible is not just a nice children's story. In the wrong hands the Holy Scripture is put to unholy use. The word of God is blasphemed when it is used as a call to hatred and war, was blasphemed when it was used to justify slavery. Scripture is abused when it is preached only out of fear and punishment.

Warning, danger inside, read at your own risk. And yet we also believe that Holy Scripture was inspired by God, and written for our learning. And so, we are called to hear the Scriptures, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them.

Hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest. It is another way of saying “study, explore and incorporate.” By faith we know Scripture to be inspired by God, yet we also know that Scripture was written long ago, by a multitude of human authors over many centuries and in languages and cultures far different from our own. It has been studied throughout the ages more deeply than any other writing. More books have been written to explain the Bible than any other books. Books have even been written about books that have been written about the Bible. You might think that all should now be clear, and yet it is not. Each generation writes its own set of commentaries, each generation brings its own understanding.

There is a saying that you can never step into the same river twice. Each reading of God's word is also new. No one reads the Bible the same way twice. It is not surprising that there are no easy or pat answers; it is not surprising that God's word challenges us, and renews us. And some passages, you just have to wrestle with, you have to go deeper, look harder. Usually the most important question to ask is not “what?” but “so what?”

Hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest. Go back and read the story again, hear the words of Jesus again, and you will learn something new. The story has continual surprises, continual lessons for each of us. Study with a friend, and gain a different perspective. The Holy Scripture is not meant to be heard once, and then you know what it means. It is meant to be taken into our soul over and over and over again. Only after much study and prayer can we hope to inwardly digest Scripture's message, and be nourished by it.

While the Bible might well come with a warning label, it is also food for the journey, and sustenance for the soul. Each day it is there for us to take up again. Every day it is there, enough, never exhausted. But if not gathered, consumed, inwardly digested, the words become stale and useless to us, jottings in a dusty old book on a shelf, incapable of providing nourishment. But hear it, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest its words every day, and you shall never go hungry. Learn that, and then you will start to know the real meaning of Scripture.