

441 What's the point of studying the Bible?!

A friend who is studying theology, and who knows I spend a lot of time studying my Bible, told me that he's really struggling with 1 and 2 Peter – 'I just don't *get* it!'

That was a ~~red rag~~ green light to a ~~bull~~ racing driver. The next morning I read right through those two ~~books~~ letters. I was amazed by what I found. A different author, but the exact same message as Paul to the Ephesians, which I had just been 'studying' (i.e. reading the whole thing through). And isn't it the same message as John's letters, too?

All three ~~authors~~ letter-writers are totally thrilled and inspired by God's amazing unconditional love and willingness to forgive, and they urge their readers to do the really hard thing: put that love into practice, even loving our enemies, as Jesus said. Not loving is sin (none of us is without sin); loving is doing good, doing what is right – not easy, especially in the face of suffering.

But when we ~~read~~ study a ~~letter~~ book, what do we often do? Read 'obvious' bits, saying, 'Yes, that's clear; no need to discuss it.' Then we tackle the 'interesting' bits: 'I wonder exactly what *this* means?!' We can be obsessed by exactly 'how it works', e.g. the exact 'how' of salvation. It's a mystery, just accept it and *put it into practice!*

If I were Paul, Peter or John, I'd get really cross. We can so easily gloss over the point of their letters: *we need to actively, with every fibre of our being, (a) appreciate God's love and (b) put it into practice in our everyday behaviour, despite the suffering.*

Then people's lives will be changed. *Then* people will come to faith. *Then* people will worship our wonderful God.

It's all too easy to 'study' our Bibles in order to work out what 'the Bible says' – often about contentious issues – and even end up splitting churches. Hence the estimated 45,000 different denominations in today's world – whatever became of 'one church'?! (Maybe these hair-splitters/church-splitters are the antichrists of the last times?)

Yes, I know about the Reformation. I know that churches do get things so wrong that we have to take a stand, but *not* if that means we take our eyes off the main point of our being 'church' – to love God and to love our 'neighbour' (whoever that be).

And yes, I know that mainline churches are shrinking, so something needs to change. And, yes, I know that some of you are in non-mainline churches and can say, 'But my church is growing!' Maybe so, but that's just a drop in the godless ocean.

Something does need to change, but I don't think it's 'how we do church'; I think it's *who we are*, in whatever church we're in. Wherever we are, we need to love with every fibre of our being. That was Paul's and Peter's and John's main message.

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