

Romans 7.14–20

An Undivided Life: reflecting on Scripture

Amington

Sunday 14 July 2019

The Life You've Always Wanted (12)

Razzle Dazzle

Show Daz 'Razzle Dazzle' advert.

Other laundry detergents are available...

The Bible is like Daz for your mind and soul and heart – but before we find out why, let's take a step back.

What *is* the Bible?

In twos and threes, have a quick discussion about this question: **What *is* the Bible?**

Take answers and write them on the whiteboard.

On a human level, here is what the Bible *is*:

- § A book of books – 66 in total
- § Split into two sections: ‘Old’ and ‘New’ – written ‘Before Jesus’ and ‘After Jesus’
- § At least 40 different authors
- § History, poetry, wisdom, letters

But the Bible is *more* than a collection of human writings – it has 40 different authors, and one author, because it is also

- § The Word of God

§ It’s like this: the Bible is § 100% the words of human beings, and it is § 100% the Word of God. It is unique and special – there is no other book like that – and so it has a load of *other* important properties, as the Word of God. Here are some of the things the Bible says about itself:

- § The Word of God – 2 Peter 1.21
- § Truth – John 17.17, Proverbs 30.5
- § God-breathed, useful – 2 Timothy 3.16
- § Living, active, and sharp – Hebrews 4.12
- § A lamp / light – Psalm 119.105
- § A witness to Jesus – John 5.39

- § The sword of the Spirit – Ephesians 6.17
- § Food – Deuteronomy 8.3
- § Effective, powerful – Isaiah 55.11
- § Perfect, reliable, right, pure – Psalm 19.7-8
- § Valuable, precious – Psalm 19.10 (*cf coronation of Queen Elizabeth II ‘the most valuable thing that this world affords’*)
- § Complete, finished – Revelation 22.18-19

§ Here’s that list in full – and it is by no means exhaustive.

What does the Bible *do*?

In your twos and threes, have a quick discussion about this next question: § what does the Bible *do*?

Take answers and write them on the whiteboard.

The Bible does a lot of things, but I’d like to focus on two today:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, **cleansing her by the washing with water through the word**, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Ephesians 5.26-27 (NIV)

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and **training in righteousness**, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3.16-17 (NIV)

One of the regular themes in the Bible, one of the hardest but also one of the most important, is the blend between what God does, and what we do. In these passages we see such a blend.

Let's go back to our reading, from Romans 7 – I have to say, it's one of those passages that makes my brain hurt:

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

Romans 7.14-20 (NIV)

Got it? Anyone recognise § this? It is the Pushmi-pullyu from Doctor Doolittle. Or, has anyone ever done one of § these?

I think this is what Paul is describing – the language evokes the confusion within himself, the competing voices, the tug of war (in fact in verse 23 he talks about the **war** raging inside him) – he knows what he should do, but for some reason he can't do it, and ends up doing the very thing he doesn't want to do.

I often use anger as an example – probably because it is a personal struggle – have you ever felt the red mist descend, knowing you shouldn't get angry but you just can't help it? Have you ever heard yourself gossiping, knowing you shouldn't be saying those things, but for some reason you just can't stop your mouth, and the nasty and harmful words come tumbling out?

This is sin – our brokenness, our imperfections, our rebellion against God – at work within us. We are simply not able to resist it, in the same way that a surgeon cannot perform heart surgery on herself – and so we end up doing things we know we shouldn't – sometimes even doing things we *hate*.

§ What a wretched man I am! says Paul – **who will deliver me from this body of death** (Romans 7.24)?

It sounds hopeless – but what comes next? **§ Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord** (Romans 7.25).

Let's go back to those passages about what the Bible *does* **§**.

Cleansing (Ephesians 5.26-27)

First, the word **cleanses** us. Twice in these verses Paul talks about God's plan for us: to make us **holy**. That's why in our church family prayer we pray we might **mature in holiness**. All that sin, all that brokenness, which makes us double-minded, that stops us doing the things we want, the good things we know we should – Jesus **gave himself up for us to make us holy**, cleansing us **by the washing with water through the... word**.

Remember that Daz advert? The Bible – God's Word – is like Daz. It cleans and cleanses – not our clothes, but our hearts, our minds, our souls – so we might be **without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish**.

Now, when I first started washing my own clothes, I used to put *loads* of laundry liquid in the washing machine. It makes sense – the dirtier the clothes, the more detergent you need. But what happens when you do that? You end up with residue all over the clothes – and over time your washing machine will start to smell.

Sometimes people make that mistake when reading the Bible – we read so much of it, we end up not paying attention to what it says, to what God is saying to us *through* it. An important lesson is this:

The goal is not for us to get through the Scriptures. The goal is to get the Scriptures through us.

John Ortberg, The Life You've Always Wanted (188)

Personally, I think every Christian should aim to read the entire Bible at least once in their lifetime. It's not easy, but it's so important that we don't only read the bits we know well – we will misunderstand what it says if we only focus on some bits.

What I'm talking about here is reading the Bible in a different way – not to get through it, but so it gets through you.

Psalms 1 says this **§**:

Blessed is the one...
whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.

Psalms 1.1-2 (NIV)

The word 'meditate' means 'mutter' – the picture is of someone muttering to herself the words of Scripture, day and night.

The idea is that, every day, we read a few verses of the Bible, slowly and deliberately, paying attention and listening to what it says, and then bringing our minds back to that through the day. It might not be the best idea to mutter out loud if you're with other people... but whatever works for you.

This isn't magic, this is how God has chosen to work in us: as we reflect on and repeat the words of truth in Scripture, as we focus on God and his words, rather than on ourselves and our selfish desires, so our minds begin to be transformed and cleansed. God gives us the power to start turning away from sin, and towards him.

Training (2 Timothy 3.16-17)

¶ And that's the second part of this blend – *training*.

If you wanted to learn how to fix the electrics in your car, what would you need? Probably a Haynes manual, or someone to show you how – or both. If you wanted to navigate safely up and down a mountain, what would you need? Probably a map, or someone to show you the way – or both.

Friends, in this life we have both: the Bible, and Jesus. Jesus is our example, our guide, our demonstrator – and the Bible is our map, our manual – we need to learn to listen, and follow.

How will you know how God wants you to live your life, if you rarely – or never – open the book and read the words he has spoken to tell us – *and then put them into practice?* How will we even know *who God is*, unless we read the book he has given to tell us?

If you don't know where to start – each month we produce a prayer calendar, with readings for every day, as well as people to pray for. You could start there – or with one of the gospels, reading a section a day. Or, you could start with the psalms. If you aren't sure, please speak to me – there are so many ways and resources that can help us read *and meditate* on Scripture.

Please don't feel overwhelmed by it – the important thing is not that we get through the Bible, but... that we allow the Bible to get through us – that we allow God to cleanse and train us through these words he has spoken, and through which he speaks today.

The one book

GK Chesterton – a famous Christian writer – and several other literary figures were once asked what one single book they would like to have with them if they were stranded on a desert island.

‘The complete works of Shakespeare,’ said one without hesitation.

‘I choose the Bible,’ said another.

‘How about you?’ they asked Chesterton. ‘I would choose *Thomas’ Guide to Practical Shipbuilding*,’ he replied.

We might not be trapped on a desert island – but if we were, I think we’d be pretty single-minded about trying to escape, and that is the *one book* we would need.

We might not be trapped on a desert island – but we *are* trapped by our sin, our double-mindedness – we cannot escape – without help. If only we had the *one book* we help us escape.

Friends, this is that book. This is the *one book* we need, the *one book* through which God cleanses us, the *one book* through which God trains us to do what is good.

Peter said to Jesus, **‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life’** (John 6.68). So, let us listen to them.