

Life-Shaping Theology

by Pastor Marvin R. Barham

Titus 1:16 *They profess that they **know God**; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.*

Webster defines Theology as – the study of God and His relation to the world. To know God is to obey God's Word because we love Him for who He is. But to live contrary to His Word in works or in our hearts is to deny Him. We cannot obey what we do not know. I see many parents who demand obedience from their children when they have never made the standards and expectations clear. Often, this is the case because the parents are not sure themselves what the expectations are, should be or how to clearly define them. Often, it is because they never had them established in their childhood and thus never applied them to their own lives. As a result they establish rules that have no foundation of principle and no connection to relationship of expectation of the heart. Thus their rules and the standard of expectation of those rules are relative in consistency and clarity. This leads to poor relationship between parent and child, lots of frustration and resentment. This same scenario happens in the church. Because so many do not study the Word of God they really do not know the very God they say they love, worship and serve. They pray to Him, sing to Him, or may even serve in His church but they do not see the importance of actually studying His Word to seek out the depths of His heart's intent, expectations, and motivation for each.

II Timothy 2:15 *Study to shew thyself **approved unto God**, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

In his book of Hebrew Idioms Dr. Ron Moseley states, "In ancient Hebrew the bet midrash (house of study) was the main place for the study of the Law of God and all interests that surrounded its investigation. It was here that students spent most of their day, either in individual study or under the discipline of a rosh yeshivah (elder rabbi). Study of the Torah was considered in ancient times to be one of the highest forms of worship. In the Christian writings it is seen as a means of showing oneself approved of God."¹

I believe that much of the church in western culture has lost sight of why we gather to study the Word of God. We come and enjoy the awesome worship, we enjoy the visual presentations that excite our right brain but then we seem to simply endure the message coming from one who has spent time in study of the Word. We seem to think the Word being presented is not really teaching us anything. In either case there is an issue of our hearts, an issue with our perception of the Word of God and the lack of passionate introspective to glean anything from it and find a means of which to apply it to our lives. If I cannot see how it applies to my life or I have no intention of applying it to my life, then indeed the Word of God has no relevance and is boring to me. I believe here in the one of the greatest problems. If we are honest we either listen to the Word to endure that part of the service or we listen for intellect's sake. Either way, we really have no intent on actually applying it to our daily lives and allow it to shape us into Christlikeness.

Too often we listen to the Word of God and the question going through our minds is not "How does this apply to me and my life?" Instead, it is "Does this make me feel better about myself and the way I am living?" Or "Wow, I wonder if so and so is getting this? I can think of who all this applies to." What about this one, "Wow, he must be preaching to just me personally and that is offensive."

II Timothy 3:16 *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is **profitable** for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:*

The Word of God, first of all, is profitable to you or I when we actually hear it for ourselves and then do something with it, allowing it to shape us into the image of Christ and change the patterns of our lives and who we are into that of God's pattern. Second, that profitability only comes when the Word of God is allowed to establish sound doctrine or understanding of who God is and what He expects of you and when you allow it to reproof or examine your life's actions, attitudes, and motives compared to God's and make corrections where necessary giving instruction in how to live in righteousness.

1 Timothy 4:8 *For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is **profitable** unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*

Many things we do in the Christian community such as coming to church, charity, singing or participating in worship, prayer, fellowship, tithing, etc. are profitable. However, none are as profitable alone as if you apply them in your life with knowledge and understanding of who God is and what His clear expectations are in the covenant relationship you have made with Him. Each are a practice of religious expression rather than acts of relational obedience, if you have no clue as to why you are doing what you do and miss the point or intent of God's person in the principle. You can practice Christianity and never have a real heart connection with the Christ of your Christianity. This is true life-shaping theology. This is what changes lives and brings real life change. This is the theology we must teach our children and demonstrate to the world. We must move from a conceptual theology to a functional theology.

Every day we are given opportunities to make conceptual theology become functional theology. "Each situation of each day provides opportunity to test, experience, discuss, contemplate, apply, and internalize important biblical truths. Biblical truths having to do with authority, sowing and reaping, the nature of truth and falsehood, wisdom and foolishness, law and grace, confession and repentance, forgiveness, and the nature and function of the heart all get put on the table in the midst of these crucial moments of submission and rebellion."²

We must possess sound understanding and resolve of fundamental biblical truths. "These include the sovereignty and providence of God, the ever present help of the Lord, the nature of biblical relationships, spiritual warfare, discipline, self-control, contentment, faithfulness, trustworthiness, the nature of the body of Christ, the world, the flesh, the Devil, the principles of responsibility and accountability, biblical priorities, discovery and stewardship of gifts, and many other biblical truths and principles."²

"If we are to be His instruments, we must deal with our own idolatry and bring a robust biblical faith to each rocky moment, a faith that believes that God rules over all things for our sake, that He is an ever-present help in trouble, that He is at work in every situation accomplishing His redemptive purpose, and that His Word is powerful, active, and effective."²

¹ Dr. Ron Moseley, Hebrew Idioms

² Paul David Tripp, Age of Opportunity