

Discipleship: Knowing God's Voice Well: the Bible Part 3

Ricardo Campos, Pastor Grace Chapel, Orange, CA October 6, 2019

I. Introduction

God created life and everything in it and He insists that we live it His way, not because He's a tyrant but because He loves us. He left instructions for us in a book called the Bible. From life's ultimate questions to Molecular Biology, God has something to say about all of it. And since He defines life, we need to hear what He has to say. But we must go beyond study; we must meditate on what He said as we ask, "What is God saying and how does it apply to me?"

II. Discipleship: Knowing God's Voice Well: the Bible

When God created this world and everything life is (and would ever be) He intended that we live life based on what He told us. He never wanted us to live without His guidance; every time we try, it goes terribly wrong. If we're going to succeed and overcome our failures, we need His instructions. To detach ourselves from the Bible is to detach ourselves from the answers to all our questions. We need to seek His voice and obey it.

Five rules to follow as you study God's Word (I've added one to the four we covered last time):

1. *You can—and will—understand God's Word*, God created life and He insists that we live it His way. From sunsets to space travel and everything in between, God has something to say about all of it. This means that we must be able to understand His instructions, which also means that He cannot contradict Himself. To guarantee that we would understand Him, God gave us His Spirit (John 14:26; Galatians 4:6).
2. *Context, Context, Context*, the meaning of a verse/passage will come from its Context. You're constantly asking who, what, where, when, why and how about the immediate and surrounding context. Other Scriptures may be relevant, but the initial meaning must come from the passage's immediate and surrounding context.
3. *Study Meditate on God's Word regularly*, the goal of God's Word is not *study* but *apply*. God wants us to live what He said (Matthew 7:24-27). And what He said is not in any way impersonal but very personal: God the Father and God the Son want to live every second with us (John 17:3, 20-26). This requires regularly meditating on what God said, not simply studying it. We must study His Word diligently but in a way that convicts us to live it.
4. *Learn from those who've gone before you*, others have studied God's Word and we should benefit from their labor regardless of their theology. However, always check what anyone says about God's Word against what God actually said in His Word (Acts 17:10-11).
5. *Read it over and over and over*, any deep, beneficial and instructive piece of literature requires reading it over and over again. The Bible is the deepest, most beneficial and most instructive piece of literature known to man. So it's going to require that we read it over and over and over again, as we ask, "What does it mean and how does it apply to me?"

Meditating on the 6th commandment (Exodus 20; Matthew 5), what would happen if we applied rules 1, 2, and 5 to “You shall not murder”? That is, if we *studied* this commandment, if we read it over and over, paid attention to its context and knew that God wanted us to understand it, perhaps we’d conclude something like this: after God freed the children of Israel from the land of Egypt, they recognized His omnipotence and holiness and that they were to be holy by obeying His commandments. But they soon complained about no water (Exodus 15). They complained again, accusing Him of wanting to kill them with hunger, and even though they disobeyed Him about the bread, God gave them manna for 40 years! (Exodus 16). They complained again, accusing Him this time of trying to kill them with thirst but He mercifully provided water; He also delivered them from the Amalekites (Exodus 17). Moses’ father-in-law Jethro recognized God’s omnipotence and holiness as Moses recounted all that the Lord had done for them. And through Jethro God gave Moses wisdom about how to alleviate his burden of settling the people’s disputes in addition to teaching them God’s commandments. Moses needed to appoint others under him to settle all disputes except the difficult cases which Moses would bring to God (Exodus 18). God reminded the people that they must be a holy nation by keeping His commandments; to be in the Lord’s presence, they must consecrate themselves, implying that they must always walk godly before Him (Exodus 19). Thus, God gave them various specific commands all of which again told them that they must be holy, e.g., “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20).

But what if we added rule 3, what if we actually *meditated* on what God said? Would we simply see “You shall not murder” as one of many things God wanted Israel to do in order to be holy before Him or would we see something much deeper? Jesus meditated on all these commandments and He saw something much deeper: when Jesus meditated on *You shall not murder* He saw God’s wrath against anyone who got angry with his brother without cause, against anyone calling him names like “stupid” (Matthew 5). How did we go from “No murder” to “No name-calling”? Look at the context, read it over and over and meditate on it as you ask God’s Spirit to reveal its meaning to you.

What do we see in the context? Surprisingly (or not so surprisingly) we see something very similar to the context of the original command in Exodus: before Jesus says that “No murder” also means “No name-calling,” He points out what kind of people we need to be. Notice what kind of people God wants us to be. Who are the winners and who are the losers in God’s Kingdom? God’s Kingdom works in reverse. In His Kingdom the winners are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted and reviled (5:3-12). This sounds like a recipe for failure not success; is it? Next Jesus says that we are the only light this world has; if we fail to do good works among the lost of this world, then they will not accept and glorify our Father in heaven (5:13-16). Then Jesus explains that He didn’t come to destroy God’s Law or the Prophets; He came to fulfill. God’s Law will stand until He fulfills it. Therefore, whoever brakes or teaches men to do so, will be called least in God’s Kingdom. But whoever obeys and teaches men to do so will be called great in God’s Kingdom. Finally, Jesus warns us that unless our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, we’ll never enter God’s Kingdom (5:13-20). And this is not “works salvation”: in order to enter God’s Kingdom you need to possess perfect righteousness, which can only be attained by faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21-22) and can never be attained by our righteous deeds. And this eternal life can never be taken from you no matter how many sins you commit afterwards; Jesus always remains faithful though we may not (2 Timothy 2:11-13). However, to enjoy God’s presence and avoid His discipline for sin, you must walk in righteousness by means of the Spirit because God cannot have anything to do with sin (Romans 8:4; Galatians 5:16; 1 John 1:5).

What's the similarity between this and the context of Exodus 20? Over and over in Exodus God told the children of Israel that they must be holy as He is holy. Now, they are His people and therefore as His representatives to the world, they must be a holy nation. If they want to enjoy His presence, their actions must be pure. They must not have anything to do with wicked things like murder (Exodus 15:11, 13; 16, 26; 18:11; 16:28; 18:11, 16, 20; 19:5-6, 10, 14, 22; 20:1-17, 20, 23). If you *meditate* on this, you'd ask yourself questions that would lead you to realize that "No murder" also means "No name-calling."

You'd ask questions like, "Why is God so insistent on holiness? Why so many rules about how I treat Him and those around me? What does it matter how I treat my parents or neighbors? Why can't I lie, cheat or steal? What would be the harm? Why does He care about what I think? What's He telling me about the kind of person He wants me to be? What's He telling me about how He sees life vs. how I see it?" This would lead you to contemplate a command like "You shall not murder" and go deeper than the clear prohibition contained in the command. You would say to yourself, "Hmm, what would it take to commit murder? What is the journey I would have to take that would lead me to actually murder someone? Before I would ever kill them, how would I treat them, how would I feel about them, what would I say to them? I'd have to be really angry with them; I'd probably hate them more and more until I finally took their life." Then you would see that when God says, "You shall not murder," He actually means, "Not only do I not want you to murder anyone; I don't ever want you getting near that sin through things like hate and name-calling. Why do you think I said, 'Whoever hates his brother is a murderer' in 1 John 3:15?" Meditating on what God said, makes you realize who He is and therefore who you should be and not just in the big things, but in the little things that lead to big things like murder. You'd see in the Ten Commandments that there are only two things God is concerned about: How you treat Him and how you treat others (Matthew 22:34-40). You'd see that He not only cares about how you act but what you think (notice the link between the 8th and 10th commandments: what is "coveting"? It's stealing with your mind.).

When you meditate on the surrounding context in what Jesus says about the 6th commandment, you walk away with a similar reality: God and His Kingdom require that we be holy as He is holy (5:48). So that commands like "No adultery," "No false witnessing," "Love your neighbor" go far beyond the prohibition they state: "No adultery" becomes "No lusting." "No false witnessing" becomes "Don't swear by anything at all, instead, just keep your word." "Love your neighbor" becomes "Love not just your neighbor but your enemies, those who curse you, those who hate you, and those who spitefully use you and persecute you."

In other words, to meditate on God's Word versus just studying it is to think about God's Word in relation to your life, i.e., you're not just asking, "What does it say?" You're asking, "What does it say and how do I apply it to my life?" It's you seeking your Father's voice and will and doing it. When you look into the mirror of God's Word, you're not supposed walk away with knowledge about the mirror (God's Word) but you. You're supposed to see what God is telling you about what's wrong in your life and what you need to do to change it (James 1:22-25).

III. Conclusion

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire."