

## When Do We Read The Scriptures Correctly?

Text: John 5:39-47

Suggested Hymns:

522, 268, 264, 840, 621

1) An overview of the text

2) When we seek to find Christ in them

3) When we let nothing usurp the place of Christ

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 5:39–47, *<sup>39</sup> You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.*

*<sup>40</sup> But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. <sup>41</sup> “I do not receive honor from men. <sup>42</sup> But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. <sup>43</sup> I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.*

*<sup>44</sup> How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God? <sup>45</sup> Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you — Moses, in whom you trust.*

*<sup>46</sup> For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. <sup>47</sup> But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”*  
(NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Christ frequently complained that the Scriptures were not read correctly. We read in Matthew 19:4, *<sup>4</sup> And [Jesus] answered and said to them, “Have you not read ...”* The meaning is this. If the Pharisees had read the Scriptures aright, correctly and properly, their question would not have been necessary because the Scriptures long ago answered the question in the very first book of the Bible.

The full narrative is written in Matthew 19:3–6, <sup>3</sup> *The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?”*

<sup>4</sup> *And [Jesus] answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ <sup>5</sup> and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? <sup>6</sup> So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”*

A similar example of people not reading the Bible correctly is given in Matthew 22:29, <sup>29</sup> *Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. Jesus is clearly telling them that they are in error, that they are wrong.*

Christ tells these Sadducees who denied the resurrection that, if they had read the Scriptures correctly that they would have found that Moses taught the resurrection quite plainly.

Jesus replied to their question in Matthew 22:31–32, <sup>31</sup> *But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, <sup>32</sup> ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”*

Yet another example of people not reading the Bible correctly is given in Matthew 21:15–16, <sup>15</sup> *But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant <sup>16</sup> and said to Him, “Do You hear what these are saying?”*

*And Jesus said to them, “Yes. Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise’?”*

The chief priests and scribes were displeased with the hosannas of the children, and asked Christ: “Do You hear what these are saying?” He answered: “Yes. Have you never read ...” intimating that their displeasure and their feeling offended was caused by their failing to read correctly the Scriptures, the Psalms.<sup>1</sup>

One final example is given in Luke 24:25. When Christ called the two Emmaus disciples *“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!* and then began to expound the Scriptures, He plainly told them that, if they had read the Scriptures correctly, His suffering and death would not have offended them, nor would they have doubted His resurrection.

From these examples we see that it is not enough merely to read the Scriptures, but they must be read correctly. The theme for today is *When Do We Read the Scriptures Correctly?* May the Lord bless our meditation.

### 1. An Overview Of The Text.

Our text begins, <sup>39</sup> *You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.* <sup>40</sup> *But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.*

The trouble was not that the Jews did not have access to the Father’s Word. They had His Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament, and they had studied those Scriptures, searching for eternal life.

They studied, but they did not learn. They looked, but they did not see. The Scriptures were all about Jesus. Now Jesus came with signs and miracles, but still they did not believe. They did not want to come to Jesus for the very life that they were seeking.

We need to read carefully and see where the fault lay. The Jews refused to come to Jesus. Their wills opposed God’s promised Messiah.

Jesus says in our text, <sup>41</sup> *“I do not receive honor from men.* <sup>42</sup> *But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you.* <sup>43</sup> *I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.* <sup>44</sup> *How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?*

Jesus wasn’t jealous of receiving praise and honour from men. He wasn’t trying to establish His authority by attracting adoring subjects. He wasn’t perturbed because the Jews didn’t play the part.

No, the problem was much different and bigger than that. Jesus spoke bluntly: *“I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you.”* These Jews

did not truly love God. They did not have the love of God in them, motivating them and guiding them. Therefore they clashed with Jesus.

In contrast, false Christs would come in their own names, and the Jews would hail them as messiahs. It had happened and would happen again.

The Jews were too caught up in mutual admiration. They sought and received honour from one another, something like ‘honour among thieves.’ They paid attention to human, earthly vanities and neglected to seek the honour that belongs to and comes from the only God. The very thing they accused Jesus of they did themselves: they made themselves equal to God. No wonder they could not believe in Jesus.

Our text concludes, <sup>45</sup> *Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you — Moses, in whom you trust.* <sup>46</sup> *For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.* <sup>47</sup> *But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”*

These Jews did not have to take Jesus’ word for any of His claims. And Jesus did not have to accuse them before the Father. They were accused already by the one person whose authority they accepted above all else—Moses.

The Jews drew their inspiration and hope particularly from the five books of Moses. But they demonstrated they did not actually believe Moses when they failed to believe Jesus. The logic is indisputable because Moses wrote about Jesus.

His entire message centred on Christ: from Genesis 3:15 to Deuteronomy 18:15, from the Passover lamb to the sin offering. The Jews saw only the law in Moses and missed the message of Jesus Christ that gives eternal life.

Since the Jews did not believe God’s words written by Moses, naturally they would not believe God’s Son, even though He spoke the same truth.

This means that: -

## **2. We Read The Scriptures Correctly When We Seek To Find Christ In Them.**

Christ is in the Scriptures. Mightily they testify of Him. They speak of Him as the Seed of Abraham, the one and only Seed. They speak of Jesus as the Sceptre of Judah, as the Root of Jesse, and as the Star of Bethlehem.

The scriptures also speak of Christ as an Antitype. For example as the Antitype of the silent sacrifice of Isaac lying on the wood laid upon the altar which Abraham had built. As Joseph with his sudden rise from the prison to the throne. As David, suffering and persecuted by his own flesh and blood. As the bronze serpent on the pole. As the many Old Testament sacrifices, all of which testified of Christ.

The summary of the purpose of Christ's life is given by Peter in Acts 10:43, <sup>43</sup> *To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.*”

All the Scriptures lead to Christ and salvation in Him. That is the one purpose and intention of the Scriptures, to preach this Christ as the Saviour of sinners and the Fountain of eternal life.

The person who reads the Scriptures correctly is the person who finds his Saviour in it, comes to Christ, and believes in Him, for he has found eternal life. Just as we read in John 5:24, <sup>24</sup> *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.*

The Jews indeed searched the Scriptures, but not aright, not correctly. Our text says, <sup>39</sup> *You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.* <sup>40</sup> *But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.*

Christ does not say that the Jews thought too highly of the Scriptures or were mistaken in thinking they had eternal life in them. He does not by any means imply that eternal life is not in the Scriptures, but that they failed in getting this eternal life because of the wrong manner in which they read the Scriptures.

They did not come to Jesus, did not believe in Him, and did not accept Him as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Luther said regarding Jesus in the Scriptures. *“Study the Scriptures in order that you may seek and find [Christ], [Christ], in them. He who reads them in*

*such a way that he finds [Christ] in them is the right master of the Scriptures and will also certainly find life in them. But if you do not find [Christ] in them, then, truly, you have not studied nor understood them aright and have not eternal life, though you read them a thousand times; it is all nothing and in vain.”*

*We read in John 4:21–24, <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. <sup>24</sup> God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

Have you found Christ in the Scriptures? Have you come to Him? Have you accepted Him as your personal Saviour, who *At great cost He has saved and redeemed you, a lost and condemned person. He has freed you from sin, death, and the power of the devil - not with silver or gold, but with His holy and precious blood and His innocent suffering and death?* If so, your are truly blessed!

### **3. We Read The Scriptures Correctly When We Let Nothing Usurp The Place Of Christ.**

However, be on your guard and let nothing take the place of Christ.

The purpose of the Scriptures is to make men wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Only then therefore do we read and use the Scriptures correctly when we let nothing take the place of Christ.

The Jews permitted Moses and his Law to take prominence. They trusted in Moses. Our text says <sup>45</sup> *Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you — Moses, in whom you trust.*

They fixed their hope on Moses, as we read in John 9:28–29, <sup>28</sup> *Then they reviled him and said, “You are His disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples. <sup>29</sup> We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from.”*

They hoped that by following the outward regulations of Moses’ Law they would be saved. They made of Moses and his Law something both were never

intended to be, just as all teachers of salvation by morality and good works do today.

Others make the man Jesus, the philosopher, the reformer, the teacher, the character-builder, take the place of Christ the God-Man, the Saviour of sinners.

Again, others accept false prophets, who come in their own name, without authority from God, who seek their own glory, advantage, and gain. They consider the Scriptures too unreliable and therefore do not trust their souls to Christ of whom the Scriptures testify, but yield themselves to all kinds of impostors, and false Messiahs.

Still others prefer the praise and love of men rather than God's commendation. Our text says, <sup>44</sup> ***How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?*** They prefer the love of father and mother, worldly companions and associates, Christless societies with their boasting benefits. Others let the press and public opinion influence them more than the Scriptures.

But as Scripture says in John 20:31, ***these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.***

So read your Bible correctly, and be on your guard against all such and similar usurpers of Christ's throne in your heart.

Jesus, and Jesus only, must be your King and Saviour. — Read your Bible regularly, and prayerfully. May the Holy Spirit always guide you to find in the Scriptures Christ and in Him life and salvation! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 8:2

<sup>2</sup> 2 Timothy 3:15