

“36,000 Scripture Quotations”

While doing some study concerning the lives of Christians who lived in the first through fourth centuries, I came across some facts that amazed and humbled me. I learned that the writings of Christians living in those times were very Bible-centered, focusing most of the content of their writings on the New Testament. Biblical scholars like J. Harold Greenlee, and Bruce Metzger have stated in so many words that if the New Testament scrolls were somehow lost or destroyed, we could reconstruct the entire New Testament from the writings of these Christians. Imagine that! The writings of these people were so focused upon the gospel of Christ that one could reconstruct the New Testament from what they wrote! In fact, those who have studied these writings have counted no less than 36,000 Scripture quotations in these works! *

Specifically, I have learned about men like ...

- Irenaeus, who lived about 120-205 A.D. He recorded some 1,819 quotations from the New Testament in his writings. (Irenaeus was a student of Polycarp, who was a student of the apostle John.) His writings included quotes from Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, 1 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Hebrews, and Titus.
- Ignatius (50-110? A.D.) quoted from Matthew, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Galatians, Colossians, James, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, and 1 Peter.
- Clement of Alexandria (150-212 A.D.) quoted from the New Testament some 2,406 times in his writings! His works include quotations from 24 books of the New Testament!
- Cyprian (died in 258 A.D.) cited about 740 Old Testament passages, and 1,030 New Testament passages in his works.

These are but a few of the examples of early writers who, when they wrote, quoted extensively from the Bible. *

Do not such facts as these fill us with amazement? Don't they also humble us? When I read such facts as the above, I realized that the reason that there were such a large number of Bible quotations in those men's writings is because this is what they were teaching! They were not teaching and spreading the thoughts of men, but were teaching the word of God to people. Of course, the best way to teach God's word (then or now) is to include actual quotations from Scripture. Is there any wonder why the Ephesian letter says, "Whereby when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:4)?

When I learned those facts, it made me want to re-examine my preaching and writing. Am I quoting Scripture in my preaching and writing? Am I making sure folks know that when I preach, write, and talk with them, that I am putting the Lord's word and will first above all else? Jesus taught His followers to "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his

righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). This needs to happen in preaching, writing, and every other aspect of our teaching. In addition to this, it makes me look around and notice what others are doing. Brethren, we are seeing many who wish to emphasize less Scripture in our preaching and teaching. We know Satan and the world wants less Scripture (even none), but what about those of us who are called out of the world? What about those of us who are a part of the “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9)? Will we tolerate this? What did those men of the first through fourth centuries see that those of us in the twenty-first century are not seeing? Many are treating the Bible lightly. Could it be that we are taking the Bible knowledge of the population for granted, and assuming folks know more than they really do? Is it possible that “we” have become embarrassed by the gospel? Timothy was told, “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner” (2 Timothy 1:8). The apostle Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ ...” (Romans 1:16). Are we ashamed? Or, is it that we are ashamed to reveal our ignorance of the Scriptures (Hosea 4:6)? Either way, let us repent and let us be a people whose hearts and lives are filled with Scripture!

This article is a call to people to “let the word of Christ dwell in (us) richly in all wisdom ...” (Colossians 3:16) so that we may obey God! Of course, such a way of life happens by spending more time in God’s word, not less! Let us therefore demand God’s word be quoted and taught in our preaching, writing, and in all aspects of our lives. Peter said, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God ...” (1 Peter 4:11). Let us obey the command from that passage! God’s people were once called “walking Bibles”. Can anyone venture a guess as to why that was? How might God’s people be described today? What are we teaching people?

* Sources:

- 1) McDowell, Josh, Evidence That Demands A Verdict, p. 50-52.
- 2) Bercot, David, Will The Real Heretics Please Stand Up?

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