

## Americans Flub Religion 101

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This was the headline for a Yahoo! News story about the lack of religious knowledge in America that caught my eye on Wednesday morning.

Let's give the respondents a little bit of a break. Several of the questions were about religions outside of Christianity, such as questions about Hinduism, Buddhism, and the Islamic faith. It doesn't surprise me that lots of people got those questions wrong considering those religions are not predominant here in America. I was lucky. When I took the quiz, I guessed correctly on all of those questions.

However, there were many who didn't know the right answers to basic questions about the Bible. For instance, many thought that "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is one of the Ten Commandments. While sad, that doesn't surprise me either. It reminds me of other surveys I've seen that have been conducted by the Barna Research Group. Here are some of the results of those surveys that were done just a few years ago:

- Less than 1/2 of all adults can name the 4 gospels.
- Many Christians cannot identify more than 2 or 3 of the apostles.
- 60% of Americans can't name even 5 of the Ten Commandments.
- 82% of Americans believe "God helps those who help themselves" is a Bible verse.
- 12% of adults believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife.
- 62% of respondents believe that the Sermon on the Mount was preached by Billy Graham.
- Over 50% of graduating seniors thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife.

What does this tell us and what does it mean to us? For one, it tells us that America is becoming more and more like secular Europe - religion just doesn't matter much anymore to many people. Many people "inherit" their religion, so it doesn't mean much to them. And the Bible is not necessarily viewed as the inspired word of God, so what's the point in reading it and studying it? Even among those who believe it's the inspired word of God don't spend time reading it. They're too busy watching TV or involving themselves in other recreational activities. Ultimately, they just don't see the importance.

However, reading and studying the Bible (the two are very different) are extremely important. Paul said, "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Think about the implications of those verses. First, the Bible is inspired by God. The Greek word that is translated "inspiration" is *theopneustos*. It literally means "God-breathed". This is similar to Genesis 2:7 where "*God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.*" Here, though, He breathed his message into the writers of the Bible. The Bible is not a collection of man-made stories. It is the word of God. Since that's the case, doesn't it make sense to invest our time in finding out what He has to say to us? After all, he tells us that it's profitable for us to do so! In other words, there is much value in reading and studying the Scriptures.

The Scriptures are profitable for doctrine (teaching). In other words, the word of God is what teaches us about God and Jesus, and it's what we are to use to teach others about God and Jesus.

Scripture is profitable for reproof. That is, for convincing and convicting us of the truth and of our sins. It is through Scripture that we come to a knowledge of the transgressions we have committed against God.

The Bible is profitable for correction. It doesn't just tell us that we have sinned. It tells us how we can correct our lives - what we need to do to receive forgiveness from the God that we have wronged. It tells us that we can undergo a dramatic reformation through the power of the gospel. There is no vice, no sin, no problem that can not be corrected with the principles found within the word of God.

God's word is profitable for instruction in righteousness. Albert Barnes said it this way: "Man needs not only to be made acquainted with truth, to be convinced of his error, and to be reformed; but he needs to be taught what is right, or what is required of him, in order that he may lead a holy life." God is holy, and we are to be holy just as he is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16). The Bible instructs us on how to do that. It instructs us on how to live a righteous life. It tells us the things we need to avoid, the sins that will corrupt us and stain our soul. It shows us the kind of actions and behavior that should be present in our lives, the same actions and behavior that Jesus displayed while on earth. The Bible is a great instruction manual!

Finally, if we utilize the Bible just as it is intended, it is able to make us a complete person in God's eyes. And we'll be thoroughly equipped to do all the good work Christians are to be doing. You want to live up to your full potential? You want to be the best person you can be? It all starts with the daily reading and studying of the word of God. It's the most profitable book you'll ever read.