

Today I want to share a story that I heard from a bible teacher I've been listening to recently (his name is Ray Stedman), but it was originally told by Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse. He was the pastor of a Presbyterian church in Philadelphia, but in 1931 he started publishing two magazines, one was called *Revelation*, and the other one was called *Eternity*. *Revelation* was devoted to his sermons and his religious interpretations of current events. He founded *Eternity* for other writers, but every month for almost thirty years he wrote a series called "Window on the World". I want to talk about a "window on the world" for just a minute or two, but before that, I just want mention that Dr. Barnhouse was also a pioneer of radio preaching. He started a weekly radio program called "The Bible Study Hour", and on that program he started talking about the book of Romans. In fact, he talked about Romans every week for over ten years, and he still wasn't finished with it when he died in 1960. So that's Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse - pastor, writer and Christian radio pioneer...

...and now you've had your historical biography lesson for the day!

But what I wanted to share about him was a story he told about a window. He used it to illustrate how some people approach the bible, and the reason I like it so much is because when I heard it, I realized that I was starting to fall into the trap of exactly what he was talking about! So, he showed me something that's important to me. I'm going to have to paraphrase it, because I'm not reading his exact words, but I remember enough about it to share it with you. It's about a man who's renting a room near the ocean, and he's writing a letter to his friend, who's NEVER SEEN THE OCEAN BEFORE.

Greetings from the coast! Arrived yesterday, and all is well. My room faces the ocean, and most of the far wall is a huge window, the biggest picture window I've ever seen in a hotel room before. In fact, the whole wall is mostly glass and since I'm sitting close to it, I have the most wonderful view. I'm on the second floor, so I can look down on the beach and across the ocean all the way to the horizon, and a good ways both to the left and to the right. The window glass itself is thick but crystal clear, the highest quality glass I've seen. Even the rain drops from the storm last night rolled right off the surface without leaving any streaks. I started to worry about the window last night during the storm, until I examined the mounting of the window, which eased my fears. The frame is sturdy and they didn't skimp on the hardware, either. This is some of the finest craftsmanship I've ever seen. When I mentioned it to the owner at breakfast this morning, he gave me the name of the builder and he also let me copy the architectural plans, which contains documentation for the materials that were used in the construction. I'll attach them to this letter. Happy to share the details with you, but I wish you



could see it for yourself. I'll tell you more about it when I get back.

Sincerely, Your Friend.

OK, let me repeat that I was paraphrasing that letter, but I think I captured the essence of it.

Did you notice the terrible mistake that the writer made?

He was writing to a person who had never seen THE OCEAN,
but spent all of his time describing THE WINDOW.

The author never even tried to describe what he could see THROUGH the window. And the recipient of the letter, with all of its reference material attached, won't have any greater understanding of the ocean than he did before.

I can sympathize with that reader, who might have been excited to learn more about the ocean once upon a time, but quickly became disappointed and disillusioned, if not downright bored, by the tedious details.

Now, isn't that a little bit like how some people study the bible? True, it's the greatest work of literature ever written and deserves serious study. But it's more than what can be sorted out into allegories and similitudes and parables and poetry. It's a window. It allows us to perceive something more, if we look through it in the right way. We're born into the world knowing nothing, and no matter what we learn from other people, the bible's there to help teach us a truth, if we seek it. The bible's a tool, like an instruction manual or a master plan that's given to us to help us understand the big picture and make good decisions. It contains the wisdom of many generations that came before us, who share what they learned from their experiences, but it illuminates much more than what's being discussed by scholars who are interested in dating texts, and declaring authorship, and refining word meanings, and analyzing the writing styles of particular passages, and arguing about literal vs. figurative interpretations, and on and on and on.

I'm interested in some of those topics, too, but I have to thank Dr. Barnhouse for reminding me that what a lot of people are passionately discussing is the window, and barely giving a thought to what the window can reveal to us if we simply look through it.

Thanks, Dr. Barnhouse.

So, what is "The Ocean View", you may be wondering? Well, let me share some of the thoughts of a Ray Stedman, who told me the story to begin with. He says it better than I could:



The Bible, as you know, is not merely a collection of books: It's a divine library. It was written during the course of some fifteen centuries, and forty or more authors contributed to it. Yet through all this variety there runs one coherent theme. This makes the Bible notably greater than anything humanity could produce. For despite the tremendous diversity of human authorship and the vast span of time over which it was written, these writers produced a book which has one message. It tells one story, moves to one point, and directs our attention to one Person.

All through the Bible you find the same story, one theme tracing its way -- essentially, the story of man. It is the story of your life, and of my life. It tells us what we are because it tells us what man is. And since all of us share human life together, this is primarily and preeminently the book that goes with man. It explains man. It instructs us, exhorts us, admonishes us, corrects us, strengthens us, teaches us. It leads us into all the truth concerning ourselves. And, of course, it is the book about man primarily because it is the book about Jesus Christ, the Son of man. The whole book is the glorious story of how God became flesh, the immortal became mortal, the Eternal One became a temporal being like ourselves, for a while, in becoming man. In the story which gathers around this theme, God has incorporated all the truths we need to know about ourselves

We get to know him through the pages of the Scriptures, interpreted to us by the Holy Spirit. We can't separate those two. The Bible without the Spirit leads to dullness and boredom, to a dead Christianity. The Spirit without the Bible leads to fanaticism and wildfire. We need both the Spirit and the Word.

Ray's no longer with us in this world, but a lot of his written works and audio files are. If you're interested, you can read or hear more at raystedman.org

So, back to the question...

What happens in *your* Bible Study?

Are you looking at the window, or seeing the ocean?

