

OF MAKING MANY BOOKS

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Solomon told it right when he said, "Of making many books there is no end" (Ecclesiastes 12:12). The number of books extant today would dwarf any library Solomon ever saw or imagined. We have old books, new books, reprints, classics, even e-books. Now you can purchase a hand held device and wirelessly download entire books to it for reading anywhere, at your convenience--a virtual library in your pocket. If we were to take time to count all the volumes in our homes, we might be surprised how many books accumulate over the years.

As a preacher, my religious library has grown with time, including hundreds of volumes of greater and lesser value (though it is still small compared to many). Some I would hate to part with. Others just occupy shelf space. In younger days, I was driven to build up a library, thinking that more books translated into more advantage to a preacher. These days, it is only occasionally that a book is added to the collection and I am more motivated to actually read what is on the shelf, rather than be on the lookout for something new to place on the shelf.

Good books can aid immeasurably in Bible study, depending on the caliber of their content, and assuming they are read with a discerning eye, educated in the Scriptures. Though a fan of helpful books, I was, nevertheless, struck by an observation that Alexander Campbell made about his father:

"In my boyhood, when entering into his study, in which he had a large and well-assorted library, I was wont to wonder on seeing, with a very few exceptions, only his Bible and Concordance on the table, with a simple outfit of pen, ink, and paper. Whether he had read all these volumes, and cared nothing more for them, or whether he regarded them as wholly useless, I presumed not to inquire, and dared not to decide. But such was the fact" (*Memoirs of Elder Thomas Campbell*, p. 271).

Isn't that really what it ought to come down to? For all that can be said in favor of things like commentaries (bad examples of which can do much harm), there is nothing to take the place of a man alone with his Bible. It is easy for our perceptions to be colored by something read elsewhere, and we may end up missing what the Bible actually says because we have been helped into a misunderstanding by an unhelpful book (or article, preacher, etc.). Whatever benefit we reap from other sources, we will always need open Bibles, prayerful hearts, and minds keen on learning exactly what God wrote. And, perhaps, the church would be in better shape if, along with having his honesty of heart, more of our preachers had desks like Thomas Campbell's.

