

HOW TO STUDY THE VARIOUS BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

- Message # 8 in the series “Understanding the Bible”
- Completed Survey of the Old and the New Testament in 6 messages.
- Completed an Overview of Basics of the Bible in message #7

GOAL OF THIS SERIES:

1. Understand the flow of the Bible
2. Be transformed like Christ as one reads and applies the Bible

Romans 12:1-2

¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind.** Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

HOW TO STUDY THE VARIOUS BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

- I. 4 Basics to remember when studying the Bible
- II. Fundamental principles of Bible study
- III. Other issues to consider when studying the Bible
- IV. Tools to apply
- V. Suggestions for Reading/Studying the Bible

I. 4 Basics to remember when studying the Bible

1. NEED FOR HOLINESS

1 Peter 1:23-2:1-3

²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

²⁴ For, “All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall,

²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures forever.” And this is the word that was preached to you.

¹ Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,

³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

2. NEED FOR EFFORT

2 Timothy 2:15

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

3. NEED FOR PRAYER

Psalm 119:18

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

4. DESIRE FOR OBEDIENCE

Psalm 119:33-34

³³ Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end.

³⁴ Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart.

Luke 11:28

Blessed...are those who hear the word of God and obey it.

James 1:22

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

4 Basics to remember when studying the Bible:

- 1. NEED FOR HOLINESS**
- 2. NEED FOR EFFORT**
- 3. NEED FOR PRAYER**
- 4. DESIRE FOR OBEDIENCE**

II. Fundamental principles of Bible study

- 1. READING** – *What does the Bible say?*
- 2. INTERPRETATION** – *What does the Bible mean?*
- 3. MEDITATION** – *Call for Prayerful Reflection*
- 4. APPLICATION** – *How does it apply?*

1. **READING** – *What does the Bible say?*

- Goal is to get a basic understanding of the contents.
- Focus on the plain meaning of the text.
- Avoid looking for hidden and mystical meanings.
- Observe repeated words or phrases, key words like “So that, Therefore, But.”

2. INTERPRETATION – *What does the Bible mean?*

- Acts 8:30 “...Do you understand what you are reading?”
- First question, “**What would this have meant to the original readers?**”
 - *What was the intent of the author to the original recipients? That’s the key issue!*
- Then and only then, is the question of, “What does it mean NOW?”
- This is the process called **Hermeneutics** – Science [or Art] of Bible Interpretation.

3. MEDITATION – *Call for Prayerful Reflection*

- Quiet and Prayerful Reflection.
- Allowing the Spirit to sink the truth in our hearts.
- 2 Timothy 2:7 “Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.”
- Psalm 1:1-3 “Blessed in the one...whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night.”
- Part of meditation involves memorization as well.

4. APPLICATION – *How does it apply?*

- Lord, what do you want me to do? That's the final step! After the above-mentioned 3 steps!
- What changes do I have to implement in my life?

6 QUESTIONS TO ASK AND ANSWER WHEN STUDYING A PASSAGE

1. What is this passage mainly about?
2. Are there key words? If so, what do they mean? (Look for repeated words and phrases as well). Use a Study Bible or Bible Dictionaries for doing word studies.
3. Are there commands to obey? (Include sins to forsake as well)
4. Are there promises to claim?
5. Is there anything I don't understand?
6. What change(s) do I need to make in my life as a result of studying this passage?

THE “SPECS” METHOD OF STUDY

S – SIN TO FORSAKE?

P – PROMISE TO CLAIM?

E – EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW?

C – COMMAND TO OBEY?

S – STUMBLING BLOCK TO AVOID?

III. Other issues to consider when studying the Bible

1. LAW OF CONTEXT

2. COMPARING SCRIPTURE WITH SCRIPTURE

3. GAPS TO ADDRESS

A. Historical/Cultural Gap

B. Geographical Gap

C. Language Gap

4. LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE BIBLE

A. Didactic or Expository Form (Romans to Jude)

B. Narrative or Historical Form (Genesis to Esther, Gospels, Acts)

C. Poetic Form (Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon)

D. Proverbial Form (Proverbs)

E. Parabolic Form (Parables taught by the Lord Jesus)

F. Prophetic Form (OT Prophets, Revelation, Portions of Gospels, etc.)

1. LAW OF CONTEXT

- Immediate setting of the passage must always be taken into account.
- Then look at the passage in the context of the chapter and the chapter in the context of the whole book.
- Words, phrases, and sentences have meaning only within a given context.
- Avoids the danger of concluding what was not intended by the author!

Philippians 4:12-13

¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

¹³ **I can do all this** through him who gives me strength.

I can do all this [or all things] according to verse 13 does not refer to Paul [and us] doing whatever we want to do – sort of the worldly way of saying, “You can do whatever you put your mind to!”

Rather, it refers to living in contentment no matter the circumstances – whether we have plenty or whether we are in need!

Matthew 18:15-20

¹⁵ “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.

¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’

¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

¹⁸ “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

¹⁹ “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

²⁰ For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

Two or three gather in my name [v. 20] does not refer to prayer meetings. Rather it refers to when two or three gather as representatives of Christ to conduct church discipline towards an unrepentant member, Jesus is there with them through his Spirit to help them obey his command of maintaining purity in the local church.

2 Corinthians 5:4-9

⁴ For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

⁵ Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

⁶ Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.

⁷ **For we live by faith, not by sight.**

⁸ We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

⁹ So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.

Live [or walk] by faith, not by sight in this passage [v. 7] does not refer to the Bible's general call for Christians to exhibit faith in daily living. Here it refers to the fact that believers will get new heavenly bodies in the future – the promise of glorification. Even though we don't have it yet or can see it yet, we can live by faith that God will accomplish this task.

2. COMPARING SCRIPTURE WITH SCRIPTURE

- Also known as the **Synthesis Principle**.
- Since entire bible is God's word written by one Author – The Holy Spirit, **one part will not contradict another part.**
- If we arrive at an interpretation of a particular passage that contradicts the truth taught in another passage, one or both of the passages are being interpreted incorrectly.
- **Beware of developing doctrines based on one verse of Scripture, especially if the interpretation of that one verse contradicts other parts of Scripture.**

Doctrine of Eternal Security:

John 10:28-29

²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Doctrine of Perseverance:

Matthew 24:13

but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

- Both doctrines are taught in the Scriptures.
- No real contradiction.
- Comparing Scripture with Scripture yields results that are consistent with the Bible teaches concerning a particular subject.
- Perseverance is the MEANS through which God secures his chosen ones!

3. GAPS TO ADDRESS

A. Historical/Cultural Gap

- Knowledge of Assyria and its people helps in the understanding of the book of Jonah.
- Knowledge of Jewish and Roman customs are essential in understanding the Gospels.
- Knowledge of false teachers penetrating the churches of Galatia helps to understand why Paul wrote the letter to Galatians.
- Knowing that 1 Peter was writing to believers undergoing persecution helps in interpreting it.
- Knowledge of Divorce and Remarriage practices help in understanding passages such as Matthew 1:19; 19:3-9.
- Knowledge of the culture in Corinth is a must to interpret Paul's letters rightly.

Ask questions such as:

- What was going on in the Church or in the city at the time when the letter was written?
- What was the culture of the men and women that lived during that time?
- What prompted the writer to write this letter? Especially in the case of letters to the churches? [e.g. Why did Paul write 1 Corinthians?]

Learn well to differentiate what principles are limited to culture and what are timeless principles!

3. GAPS TO ADDRESS

B. Geographical Gap

- Understanding the geography of the lands described in the Bible helps in better interpretation of the Bible.
- For example, knowing some geographical facts about the location of the Sea of Galilee between the surrounding mountains help us in understanding the severity of storms that occur there.
- The very fact that the disciples, majority of whom were trained fishermen, were utterly terrified when their boat was hit by the storm helps us understand that this was no ordinary storm! [Mk 4:35-41].
- Knowledge of the fact that Jerusalem is 2,500 feet above sea level helps us to know why the Bible refers going to Jerusalem as “going up to Jerusalem” [Matt 20:18].

REVELATION 3:15-18 - To the Church at Laodicea

¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!

¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

¹⁷ You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

- Laodicea - a very prosperous city at that time.
- Colossae, located about 15 kms east - known for its cold and pure drinking waters.
- Heiropolis, located about 10 kms north - known for its hot springs good for healing.
- Laodicea lacked it's own water supply and by the time waters came from these 2 places it was neither hot [useful for healing], nor cold [useful for life] – but lukewarm and contaminated. Basically useless. So, Jesus rebukes them!
- Dangerous to take our 21st century meaning of hot [“hot for Jesus”] or cold [“cold toward Jesus”] and reading them back into 1st century context!
- Cannot imagine Jesus telling he is okay with someone being cold toward him!
- Point is not Jesus calling these Christians to greater service!
- Rather, he was calling these flocks claiming to be Christians to true salvation!

3. GAPS TO ADDRESS

C. Language Gap

- The Bible was written in three different languages; Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.
- Since they are very different from the English language, there are obvious challenges to the translation process.
 - Hence the use of multiple translations to help understand Scriptures better!
- **Words used by biblical writers should be understood in the sense of what it meant during the author's day – not what it means in our day and age.**
 - Words change over time! A word that meant one thing a few years ago does not necessarily mean the same today!
- Word studies [with proper tools] help in bridging the language gap.
 - Greek to English dictionaries, Commentaries/Study Bibles can also be of much help in this process.
- Of course, where possible, try to learn the original languages – even basic working knowledge can be of help!

I. 4 Basics to remember when studying the Bible

1. Need for holiness
2. Need for effort
3. Need for prayer
4. Desire for obedience

II. Fundamental principles of Bible study

1. Reading – What does the Bible say?
2. Interpretation – What does the Bible mean?
3. Meditation – Call for prayerful reflection
4. Application – How does it apply?

III. Other issues to consider when studying the Bible

1. Law of Context
2. Comparing Scripture with Scripture
3. Gaps to Address
 - A. Historical/Cultural Gap
 - B. Geographical Gap
 - C. Language Gap

4. Literary Structure of the Bible

IV. Tools to apply

V. Suggestions for Reading/Studying the Bible

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2 Timothy 2:15

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Let's pay attention to this clear command which also serves as a warning as to the fact that we will give account to God one day in terms of how we handled the Scriptures!