

How to Study the Bible:



Principles of Effective Bible Study



Welcome to -

How to Study the Bible: Principles of Effective Bible Study

Course Overview: The purpose of this lesson is to teach the church planter how to study the Bible through the principles of Observation-based Bible study.

Course Goals: By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Know how to do Observation-based Bible study.
- Be committed to study the Word of God.
- Begin to apply the principles in this study.

Follow-up Study: To obtain full credit and benefit from this class, you must complete the following three assignments:

- Read all untaught lessons and appendix material.
- Read the follow-up reading on the website www.prepareinternational.org
 1. The History of Interpretation and Current Approaches to the Bible
 2. Dealing with Apparent Contradictions
 3. Understanding the Literary Type or Genre of the Books of the Bible

Write a 3-5 page paper answering the following questions:

- What were the three most important things you learned in this course (list and describe them)?
- Choose a passage and do a complete study of that passage as described in the lessons.
- Choose a theme or topic and do a study of that topic as described in the lessons.

Sources Used for This Course: Much of this course is an adaptation of Mattersey Hall's Hermeneutics course written by Vernon Ralphs. We want to extend a special thanks to Dr. Ralphs and Mattersey Hall for permission to use their excellent material.



How To Use This Manual

This manual is full of valuable information and is designed to be interactive in nature, that is, it is designed to have you, the student stop, and learn on your own by interacting with God, His word, others, or the training materials themselves. Below is a set of icons which you will find utilized throughout the manual. Each time you see the icon, you should stop and engage in the activity prescribed.



Bible Study: When you see the Bible Study icon, pause for a few minutes, read the given passage or verse and then record your thoughts as to what God may be saying through His word.



Reflection: As you see the Personal Reflection icon, stop, and answer the question given reflecting on the information you have just heard.



Discussion: When you see the icon for discussion come up, spend a few minutes with a partner discussing the questions given in the discussion box.



Application: The Application icon will come at the end of each lesson and will usually be accompanied by several questions aimed at your applying the teaching/training to your personal life. Take a few minutes and think through how the truths apply to your life and ministry.



Part 1: The Power of God's Word

As you study the history of God's moving across the world, one thing stands out – God moves through His word. In fact, the Word of God is perhaps the primary building material the Holy Spirit uses today to develop men and women who both live well with God and who serve God with power and effectiveness.

You are in this school of ministry to be trained to be an able servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, planting churches and building churches that will glorify Christ and bring great fruit unto Him among your cities, villages, and nation.

In the New Testament alone, 'word,' 'word of God', or 'scriptures' is used over 300 times. Jesus and the other New Testament writers point to the word of God & the scriptures as the mighty tool in the hand of God and men to build men's lives!

John Calvin wrote that God, in giving us the scriptures, has accommodated Himself to human language, that is, God has chosen to use human words to reveal Himself, His ways, and His plan to men. He chose real human words, by real human beings, in real human places, in real human events to give us the highest revelation of Himself. General revelation – God revealing Himself through nature and history is wonderful, but we only see limited glimpses of His glory, plan and power. Through the Scriptures, we have a magnificent, full revelation of God in human words. Wow! Hadn't we better pay attention?

What do the Scriptures say about the Word of God?

- ✓ *All things were created by His word - By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. Heb 11:3*
- ✓ *All things are held together by His powerful word - And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. . . . Heb 1:3*
- ✓ *Man is born into God's kingdom by His word – for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, {that is,} through the living and abiding word of God. 1 Pet 1:23*
- ✓ *Man lives daily by the power of the word - "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'" Matt 4:4*
- ✓ *Jesus Christ is the very embodiment of God's word - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:1, 14*



Bible Study: Read Exodus 30:17-21. What meaning does God have for us in these instructions? What do these parts of the tabernacle represent to us?



The Power of God's Word in Our Daily Lives

In the Old Testament, in the tabernacle of Moses, God gave seven pieces of furniture or seven different apparatus and each of these was a different way man could relate to God. These were pictures and types for us to learn from for life today. As the priests would approach the tent structure itself, they would come to the second of these furnishings – The Laver. This was to be a large bowl-like structure with a polished mirror bottom filled with cool, clear water.

Before the believer-priests could enter the presence of the Lord, they were to do three things:

1. Look at their appearance as reflected in the basin of water and see themselves as *God Himself sees them*. Many people see themselves through their own eyes, or the eyes of others, but God desired the believing-priest to see himself as He saw them. The first purpose was therefore, self-inspection.
2. To wash and make himself clean. The second thing the believer-priest was to do was to wash himself with the water, making him clean in his approach to and service unto God.
3. To wash his feet – A third thing the Lord directed them to do at the Laver was to wash their feet. In the hot, desert climate of Israel, washing the feet in a cool basin of water would bring deep refreshing and give new life to the entire body. Thus, the Laver was not just a place of cleansing, but a place of refreshing also.

All of these give us a picture of the ministry of God's word in our lives. In John 15.3 and Eph 5.26-27, the scriptures tell us that we are washed and made clean by the washing of His word. The Laver is a picture of God's word in our lives. Through His word we can:

- ✓ See ourselves as He truly sees us
- ✓ Wash ourselves and make our selves clean through the word
- ✓ Refresh ourselves upon His word to give new service to Him and men

True Story: Years ago in the rural area of the United States, an elderly widow would tell the pastor every Sunday as she left the church, "Pastor, that message was life to my bones. God spoke to me today. I feel so clean and alive!" As the pastor observed the woman's life, she certainly was a testimony to the Lord, but she was very illiterate and a little bit slow mentally. One day, the pastor decided to visit the elderly widow and just find out what kind of effect God's word was "really" having in her life. As he came to her home, he found her behind the house washing clothes in the river. He sat down and then asked her, "Hilda, what was my sermon about yesterday?"

"I don't remember pastor, but it sure was a good one. Thanks so much for studying and preaching!" The pastor replied, "Hilda, you can't even remember my preaching and I bet you never understand it either."



Hilda was unhurt by the pastor's remarks and simply replied, "Preacher, you are right on. I don't understand much and I don't remember, but God's word is to me what the soap and water are to these clothes. The clothes don't know how soap and water work, but when the water flows and the soap is applied to the clothes, they get clean just the same. That is how God's word works for me!"

The Preacher just nodded his head. He had learned about the power of God's word from a little widow lady that day.

Seven Other Benefits of the Word



Bible Study: Study the seven verses below and put in your own words what they say to you about God's word.

1. Faith – divine energy – comes through the word: So faith {comes} from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. Rom 10:17 The hearing of God's word becomes a mighty channel that God's own faith is instilled into the human heart and then faith becomes power and energy to interact with God and obtain His blessings.
2. Self – Defense against the Enemy: And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Eph 6:17
3. God's word is a life source to men's souls: But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'" Matt 4:4 God's word is the very fountain of life itself. For His word connects us to Him so that we might live a different kind of life.
4. We are sanctified by the power of the word: for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. 1 Tim 4:5 Through the word of God, we grow in grace, we are changed from glory to glory, we increase in the wisdom and knowledge of God, and become mature sons. We need continual trips to God's word so that all that was provided at the cross can become ours in practical reality.
5. The word of God brings discernment into a believer's life: For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, . . . able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Heb 4:12 The gift of discerning of spirits enables us to see which spirit force is at work around us, but the discerning of the word of God reveals the depths of our own life to ourselves.
6. The word of God releases creative power: By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. Heb 11:3 Has God stopped creating? NO WAY! As we interact with His word, we come into contact once again with the creative power of God and this creative power begins to work through us.



7. The word of God is profitable for instruction and correction: All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.
8. 2 Tim 3:16-17 lastly, the word of God teaches us the How-to's of the Christian life: How to Worship, How to walk, and How to work!

Making God's Word Central to Our Life and Work

Many people have time for everything but God's word. The devil knows that if he can stop the flow of the word of God into our lives, He has stopped the flow of life itself in many ways. We have time for music, congregational meetings, small group life, work, play and entertainment, but do we have time for the Word of God? Do we come to God's great Laver daily finding cleansing and refreshing so that we might minister to God and His people?

The Exhortation of 2 Timothy 2:15

In one of Paul's final letters, a letter from a spiritual father to his son, Timothy, whom he wanted to finish the work God had entrusted to them, Paul's exhortation reads: 'Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth'.

We must know how to 'rightly divide' or 'correctly handle' the Word of truth. It is essential not only for our own lives, but also for the lives of those God gives to us to minister to and lead that we be men and women who are skilled and powerful in the Scriptures.

Paul says to Timothy, "Timothy, give your self so completely to God's word that you can handle it rightly or rightly divide it out to others." The Greek term *orthotomeo* was used by the Greeks for driving a straight road, ploughing a straight furrow, and for the cutting and squaring a stone so that it fit into its correct place. We must seriously study the Word of God as skilled workmen, and honestly use our minds and judgment with the help of the Holy Spirit in its application to our lives and those we minister to.

Four Reasons we should give ourselves to study and rightly interpret God's Word:

1. Confusing our words with God's words: As we minister to others, the key question will be, "Are we giving them our words or His?" There is no promise in the universe that our words have any power at all.
- ✓ In this age of Post-modernism where everyone has their own interpretation of life, of God, and of His word, one concrete thing we can stand upon as His servants is the solidness of the Bible. It is very essential then that we study it and learn sound principles to interpret what



we learn so that we can make sure we are giving out His words and not our own.

2. We must study the Bible and interpret it well so that we can lead God's people and the church in the pursuit of truth: As we minister to individuals, it will be critical that our lives are grounded in truth. We will face questions about marriage, children, money, ethics, salvation, grief, death. To what source will you point people? From where will your answers come?
 - ✓ On a corporate level, as we lead churches and plant new ones, where will we get our patterns for how we will do it and what it will look like? Many churches are led by the power of tradition and others are formed around being culturally relevant. These are not bad, but the bottom line question must be, what is Biblical. What does God say a church should believe, do and look like?
3. Combating Poor Teaching and Heresy: Today we are facing an enormous amount of new teaching and heresy from both inside the church and without. Many cults and sects have arisen that use the Bible as one of their teaching tools, but have perverted the message and meaning. Groups such as the Mormons and the Jehovah Witnesses seem to be Christian and are very aggressive in seeking to convert nominal church goers to their faith. If we don't know how to confront them and teach the word with accuracy to our flock, then we are not being good shepherds.
 - ✓ Even if we never have to contend with cults, the vast array of perverted teaching inside the church today is dangerous. There are many 'other' gospels being preached such as the 'wealth gospel', the 'poverty gospel', the 'back to Judaism gospel', and many others. We must be able to confront these errors and ground our congregations deeply in the word and ways of Christ. False ideas hurt lives. Truth matters!
4. To Communicate the Gospel Effectively: Many if not most believers today do not know how to communicate the gospel effectively because they don't really understand it. Much of our understanding and theology is wrapped up in meaningless clichés and catch phrases that anyone outside of our church culture would have no idea of what they meant.
 - ✓ To effectively communicate the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus we had better understand it and to understand it, we must go to the source – The Bible! Only through solid Bible study and teaching will we prepare ourselves, and those we minister to, to preach a gospel that is understandable to the hearer and loaded with powerful content.



Application: How has God's word worked in your life?

Do you see these ten workings of the word of God in your life? Which ones are not at work?

How committed have you been to the study and application of God's word to your life? Do you carefully handle it in your ministry to others?

Write out a prayer to the Lord about your desire to know and handle His word in your life and ministry below:

Written Prayer:



Part 2: The Importance of Interpreting the Scriptures - Hermeneutics

Different Approaches to Reading the Bible

When we begin to commit our lives to interact with God's word, there are two basic approaches to our relationship with God's word:

1. **Daily Devotional Reading (DDR)** – This is the beginning place for most Christians. It is the daily reading of God's word for personal interaction with God Himself. He wants to speak to us and the Scriptures are the beginning point of hearing Him speak. The purpose of Daily Devotional Reading is therefore, direct interaction with God Himself!
2. **Disciplined Study** – The second approach to our relationship with God through His word is the study of Scripture. We study to gain understanding, to renew our mind, to learn God's will, His ways, and His promises. Bible Study helps us understand the Lord, how He works, how we can work together with Him and many other important things. For those who have answered the call to serve Christ, a life of Bible Study is very important, and for this life, we must be equipped with good skills of interpreting and applying the Scriptures to our life and the lives of others.



Reflection: Why is it important to understand HOW TO interpret the Bible even in our daily devotional reading of God's Word?

Even in our devotional reading, it is critical to have skills and principles to help us understand the Scriptures or else we could believe God is saying things that He never meant to say. Proper understanding of sound principles of biblical interpretation is important in EVERY activity we undertake with the Bible.

Interpreting The Bible

'Although God desires to communicate to every person, not just anyone can understand Scripture. The Bible is clear on that point' (R. McQuilkin).

Defining Hermeneutics

R. McQuilkin's assertion is right on two counts. First, without the help of God's Holy Spirit we cannot grasp divine truth, and equally, without the knowledge of basic rules of interpretation we will fail to appreciate what the Bible says or teaches. The discipline of hermeneutics makes us aware of these truths.



Hermeneutics And Exegesis

The Greek word hermeneuo means 'I interpret or explain'.

Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation that seeks to establish the principles, methods, and rules needed for the interpretation of the Bible. It is the set of rules or principles that is used to carry out exegesis, but hermeneutics involves more than intellectual exercise, it has a dynamic role to play. The Christian preacher or teacher must be concerned with the explanation and the application of Scripture.

Hermeneutics lays down the general principles of biblical interpretation or understanding - which must lead to practical exposition. Luke pictures the Lord Jesus expounding the Scriptures this way in Lk. 24:27.

Exegesis is the careful study of the Scriptures to discover the original, intended meaning. This is always the first task of the student of the Bible – What does the Scripture mean to its original author and hearer? This is basically a simple, historical task. It is the attempt to hear and understand the words as the original audience would have heard it and understand the plain, basic meaning of God's message.

Difficulties Associated With Hermeneutics

If we hold the view that the Bible is both a divine book (the Word of God) and a human book (the Word of God through men to men), difficulties arise on two levels. The first difficulty involves understanding what men have written; the second consists of ascertaining what God has said through them.

The Nature Of Biblical Literature

Difficulties in understanding the Bible often begin with our human perception. The Bible reflects a Near Eastern culture which is foreign to our own. This means that we need to be aware of the historical, cultural, linguistic, geological, religious and philosophical gaps that require bridging for the understanding of Scripture. This means recognizing the work of good biblical scholars - it also means that a good preacher or teacher of the Word will have a growing library!

Human Limitation

Further, we need to recognize our inability to grasp God's revealed truth. God's thoughts are loftier than ours (Isa. 55:8, 9) and we are 'slow of heart' (Lk. 24:25). We need the help of the Holy Spirit. We may accept the Bible as God's revelation to us - but without his illumination of our minds we will not perceive its truth. This is where we need to appropriate the Lord's promise: 'The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you' (Jn. 14:26).

We also need to depend on the insights of others. It is a principle of God's communication with us, that no one person has a monopoly on divine truth. Divine truth has always been shared truth. Scholars, teachers and preachers are dependent on past revelation and illumination for their understanding of Scripture.



And what a rich inheritance we have! Today there is a plethora of commentaries available on every book of the Bible. We must recognize that we are dependent on the Holy Spirit and others for our understanding.

It is a fact that from the first century until today sections of the Christian church have disagreed over the interpretation of certain scriptures and doctrines. This illustrates our slowness to grasp divine truth - a short-sightedness that will be the case until the church comes to maturity (1 Cor. 13:12; Eph. 4:13).

The Distinction Of Hermeneutics

W. Kuhrt comments on the call of the preacher: 'The Christian worker ... is responsible not only to master the contents of both Old and New Testaments for his own benefit but he must become proficient in handling and using them for the instruction of others'.

We may study Scripture for our own benefit, but as those called to 'preach the word' we must study it well in order to communicate the heart and mind of God to our congregations.



Discussion: Read and consider Isaiah 66:2 and John 16:13-15.
Discuss what these scriptures say about how our minds and our hearts should be involved in understanding God's word.

Truths About The Bible

Consider these points about God's Word:

- ✓ The Bible is God's Word. We believe that the Bible is the Word of God. It is a divine message for mankind. It must have a central place in Christian worship. See 1 Thess. 2:13 and 2 Tim. 3:15-17.
- ✓ The Bible is the book of personal salvation. The Lord Jesus said the Word of God points the way to eternal life (Jn. 5:39, 40). The apostle Paul points this out to Timothy (2 Tim. 3:15). It is also the instrument of the Spirit for our growth and sanctification. See Jn. 17:17 and Eph. 5:25-27.
- ✓ The Bible needs much explanation. As God's messengers we must be proficient in explaining the Word to others. In the days of Nehemiah, Ezra stood and read and taught the Law of God and gave translation so that the people could understand clearly (Neh. 8.8). So must we! We must be able to combat the way cults (such as the so-called Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons) misuse the Scriptures. Jude calls us to 'contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints' (Jude 3).
- ✓ The Bible must be exegeted precisely. Paul was aware of the dangers of deceit and distortion in the pulpit when he wrote to the Corinthians, 'We



do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God' (2 Cor. 4:2). The cults of the Mormons and so-called Jehovah's Witnesses make us aware of the fact that we can use the Bible to support any self-conceived doctrine by distortion. As men and women of God we must not use the Word of God in any devious way (see 2 Cor. 2:17).

The Demands Of Hermeneutics

R. McQuilkin says: 'Faith is the prerequisite for truly understanding God's Word. A person who reads without faith may understand some revealed truth, but he cannot expect to fully understand any truth revealed in Scripture'.

This faith has certain aspects:

Regeneration - Understanding the Bible and hearing the voice of God from its pages begins with the new birth. The person who repents of sin and places their faith in Christ is regenerated by the Spirit of God (Jn. 3:5) and begins to experience his revelation (1 Cor. 2:9, 10). To understand the Word of God we need the help of the Spirit of God - the great interpreter of truth (Jn. 16:13).

Commitment - Jesus said, 'If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own' (Jn. 7:17). Applied to Scripture this means that the believer who reads and studies the Word must be committed to it and its Author. Personal Bible study should spring from more than intellectual interest; it should rise from a desire to know and do God's will.

Spirituality - In what R. McQuilkin calls the 'human-divine communication analysis' God seeks man through his Word, while man is also afforded the opportunity to seek God through the same divine book. The person who benefits from Bible study is a spiritual person. As well as being committed, such a person will be:

- a. Humble. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge (see Prov. 2:7; 9:10). As we study the word of God our attitude should be right. Spiritual sincerity must accompany study skills.
- b. Prayerful. 'Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law' (Psa. 119:18). The Jewish approach to the Scriptures involves prayer and meditation. The Psalmist's prayer is accompanied with the testimony, 'Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long' (Psa. 119:97). The Psalmist's prayer for enlightenment should be ours.
- c. Reverent. In Isaiah the Lord says, 'This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word' (Isa. 66:2). If the Bible is God's written word we must treat it with reverence and respect.
- d. Study. 'Seek the LORD while he may be found' (Isa. 55:6). The prophetic word to seek the Lord is a frequent invitation in the Old Testament (OT). Practically this means taking time to prayerfully study the Word. We must say with the apostles: 'We will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word' (Acts 6:4).



The Process Of Interpretation And Exegesis

So, hermeneutics demands spirituality, dedication and hard work! B. Milne comments:

True understanding is not natural to us; it is God's gift (Mt. 11:25; 16:17) through the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:13f.). This neither absolves us from hard work nor implies that we can isolate ourselves from other Christians in our understanding of the Bible. The Holy Spirit is a corporate Spirit, dwelling in all God's people (1 Cor. 12:12f.). It is folly to expect God to teach us through his Word if we neglect his ordained means of bringing us his truth, including the gift exercised by his chosen, teachers'.

This thought brings us to a very important question: How does God really speak to us through the Scriptures and how do we as men understand? It brings us to a four-part process:

1. Original Revelation and Inspiration = God spoke to men in times past giving them a revelation of Himself, His ways, and His word. This was the original revelation and is the basis of the Scriptures we have today. There is a plain meaning in all of God's word which God meant to speak through the writer to his audience. There could be other or deeper meanings that even the original author or reader never gathered but from eternity have been in the heart and mind of God.
2. Interpretation = Men study the Scriptures using rules, guidelines, principles that are clearly laid out to ascertain and understand what God was saying then to men. It is hard work and must be done under the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.
3. Illumination = No amount of hard work can bring men to understand the Scriptures as they lie in the mind and heart of God. His word clearly tells us. . . "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For {as} the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isa 55:8-9) Because of this, we must have the work of the Holy Spirit in all of our interpretation. The Holy Spirit takes the Scriptures as we study them and illumines them to our hearts and minds so that we might see their clear meaning and perhaps at times deeper meanings. When illumination occurs, God has spoken again through the power of His word as in the days of old.
4. Application and Exposition = The final two phases of the process is the application of God's word and the preaching of God's word. Jesus said ". . .but whoever keeps and teaches {God's word} he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Matt 5:19

The Bible says of the great teacher Ezra in the Old Testament. . .

"For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to practice {it,} and to teach {His} statutes and ordinances in Israel."

5 Ezra opened the book. . . 8 They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read" Ezra 7:10; Neh 8:5, 8



This is the great task of all of us who seek to be servants of the Living God. . . to set our hearts to study His word, to apply it, and then to teach others clearly with great power!



Application: Have you given Christ this great commitment? Will you be an Ezra in your generation, in your city or village?

Pray now, asking the Lord Jesus to give you the same determined heart that Ezra had as he saw the need for the Power of God's word!



Part 3: Basic Principles of Interpretation

From the last lesson, we learned that we must have a set of principles and guidelines to lead us as we study the Scriptures or we too might get into error or gain understandings and insights from the Bible that God never intended. Hermeneutics are sets of guidelines and principles to guide us and keep us on safe ground as we dig into the riches of God's word.



Reflection: Why is it important to have a clear set of Bible study principles that guide us in our interpretation and illumination of the Scriptures?

Illustration: One day two men went out to play soccer. The first had a good understanding of the game, had been trained in school of all the rules and principles to be an effective player. The other had never played before, but had only been a spectator. As the game went on, the man who had never played caught the ball with his hands and began running down the field. He came to the goal and threw the ball in. He was so excited until he looked back and saw all the players and the officials standing there in disbelief. The ball was brought back to the spot of the penalty and play was resumed. The second man became a bit frustrated. Later in the game, he kicked the ball out of bounds and began dribbling quickly up the outside of the field. He was excited, he was about to score. The whistle sounded and the ball was returned to the place it went outside the boundary. The man became more frustrated. Finally, he went to the sideline and sat down. It was clear that he was not able to play well because he didn't understand the rules and principles of the game!

Many of us are like this in regard to God's word. It is one thing to read it devotionally, that is, to have God speak bits and pieces into our lives to guide us and build us up personally, but it is quite another thing to be a servant of the Lord who needs to correctly handle the Word of Truth! We need sound principles, rules, and guidelines to lead us into a successful ministry of interpreting and teaching the Scriptures.

Principles of Interpretation

Study these following principles carefully so that you might develop a framework to understand all Scripture through.

Principle #1: Always look for the Plain Meaning first

The first principle of studying and understanding the Scriptures is to look for the plain meaning of the text. Many people approach God's word looking for "deeper meanings" while almost everything we need to know for a successful Christian life and a powerful ministry is in the simple, straightforward meaning of the Bible. God may lead us into deeper insights into a passage that touch us deeply, but the beginning place of all Bible understanding is to be found in the clear, plain



meaning. When looking for the plain meaning, the simple question is: What did it mean to the original hearer. What was God clearly trying to say to that first audience and therefore to us today?

If we do not begin our approach to the Bible here, a Scripture or passage can be made to say anything and we could move clearly out into error, lies, and heresy.



Reflection: Have you ever met someone who was always looking for the deep meanings of the Bible and were missing God's plainly revealed truth? What is the danger of this?

Principle #2: Slow Down and Ask the Right Questions

For the most part, to be a good student of God's word, we simply need to learn to ask the right questions as we read or study. By asking the right set of questions, we can arrive at the right insights from the Scriptures. Gordon Fee says, "The key to good exegesis, and therefore to a more intelligent reading of the Bible, is to learn to read the text carefully and to ask the right questions of the text."

There are two kinds of basic questions you should learn to ask. . .

- a) Context Questions
- b) Content Questions

To be a good student of the Bible, it is very important that you slow down as you read, be aware that is all that is going on, pause and think, and then ask questions with an honest heart to get answers.

Principle #3: Discover the Context

The second guiding principle of interpreting God's word is context. The word context means that we must understand things that are written within the background, situation, and framework it was written within. We cannot just pull a verse out and build a belief on that one verse. We must see the verse or the passage within its context.

There are two primary areas of context that we must understand Scripture within to be good interpreters of God's word. We must understand it in its:

- Historical Context – It helps us to understand what God is trying to say to us in the Bible when we understand a little bit about the context each book was written into. Most if not all of the books were written into a specific situation and for a specific purpose at a certain historical point in time. Understanding these context questions will help us to understand the Scriptures themselves much more. Some key questions of Historical Context are:
 1. Who = Who wrote the book and what was his / her background?



2. When = What was the time period when the book was written?
3. What = What was the situation in Israel or in the Church when the book was written?
4. Why = Why did the author write this book? What was the particular situation he was trying to address? What was going on in Israel of the church that called forth this writing?
5. Culture = Are there cultural clues of their culture then that is very different from ours now that will help me understand the Scriptures?

(Most of these questions can be answered with a good Bible dictionary, commentary or study Bible.)

- Literary Context – This is perhaps the most crucial task in learning to study the Bible and everyone can do this without the help of any experts. “Literary context means first that words only have meaning in sentences, and second that biblical sentences for the most part only have clear meaning in relation to preceding and succeeding sentences.”

Reading the Bible in context within sentences and how they fit into paragraphs, we then discover the central train of thought of the author and therefore arrive at the plain meaning of the Scripture.

We need to consider biblical words, and the importance of context for the understanding of their meaning. Words must be seen in their context, that is, in a sentence or passage (as opposed to a chapter).

Principle #4: Find the Meaning of the Words

Since the Bible was written by people, it must be treated as any other human communication in determining the meaning intended by the writers.

Understanding Human Language

The language of Scripture is normal human language - it is not a divine language.

The OT was written in Hebrew (except for a few sections written in Aramaic) and New Testament (NT) was written in everyday, market-place Greek. This means that there must be some common sense guidelines to help our understanding of Scripture.

Human thoughts are expressed in sentences, and words are the basic components of sentences. This means that words are the basic units for the understanding the meaning of any passage of Scripture. In seeking an author's intended meaning; we must consider the meanings of his or her individual words.

Three Basic Guidelines

It is a fact of life that people use words in different ways. Sometimes different people use the same word in different ways. Here are some guidelines that bear this in mind:



- a. To understand the meaning of a speaker or author, we must begin with the ordinary meaning of the language, whether Hebrew or Greek, and the type of literature with which we are dealing.
- b. We must identify the type of language being used, whether, for example, it is poetry or prose, figurative or literal.
- c. Generally speaking, we must seek a single meaning from what a speaker or writer has said. We must discern what something meant at the time of speaking or writing. Objective biblical interpretation must look for the straightforward sense of a text or passage.

A Rule

Interpret Scripture with a proper regard for the grammatical usage and plain meaning of words. The leading question to ask of any text or passage is: What did it mean to the writer and/ or readers at the time?

Context May Give Insight into Meaning



Bible Study: Study the verses below about faith. What does each of them refer to? How is this word used in Scriptures?

Context may help in deciding the meaning of a word. Consider these three important NT words:

'Faith'

The word 'faith' has a number of meanings in the NT. Note:

- a. Sometimes it means 'the gospel' (Gal. 1:23; 1 Tim. 3:9; 4:1).
- b. It can mean 'a good conscience' or 'clear conscience' (Rom. 14:23).
- c. 'Faith', especially in Hebrews, indicates a trust in the reliability of the divine promises, and is very akin to 'hope'. Consider Heb. 4:2.
- d. The Pauline epistles use the term for a whole-hearted rest in Christ and his atoning work for salvation. It is a divinely given faculty to appropriate the God given promises we have in Christ.
- e. 'The faith' (with the definite article) is used to indicate the Christian faith or the apostolic doctrine, which had to be defended (Jude 3).

'Flesh'

'Flesh' is another word that is used in different ways, for example:

- a. It may simply imply a human body and human nature without implying anything as to sinfulness or sinlessness (Jn. 1:14; Rom. 1:3; 9:3).
- b. Its most common use infers fallen human nature (Rom. 8:5; Eph. 2:3).



- c. The word is sometimes used of outward and merely ceremonial religion as opposed to that which is inward and spiritual (Gal. 3:3; Phil. 3:3).

'Salvation'

The word 'salvation' may carry a number of ideas.

- a. The word can denote physical or national deliverance. Consider Ex. 14:13; Jud. 2:16; 3:9; Acts 7:25. Note the different words used in translation.
- b. The word is commonly used of the spiritual blessings that are enjoyed through faith in Christ. In the NT the tenses of salvation are past, present and future (Rom. 5:1-2). The Greek verb used is *sozo*, 'I save'.
- c. The word is applied to physical healing. 'The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up' (Jam. 5:15, AV).
- d. The word is applied to deliverance from demonic oppression and even to the raising of the dead (Luke 8.36, Luke 8.50)

Principle #5: Is This Using Figurative Language?

Many parts of Scripture are not written in ordinary straightforward language but in some form of figurative language. When this is recognized some work must be done to determine its literal meaning.

Understanding Figurative Language

'Figurative language' refers to any words that are used with a meaning other than their common, literal sense, for example, 'dog' is used by Paul in the sense of 'evil men' (Phil. 3:2). When John says that if all the miracles of Jesus were recorded, 'the whole world would not have room for the books' (Jn. 21:25) he is illustrating the bounteous ministry of Jesus by overstatement.

Why does the Bible use figurative language? As the Bible was written by human beings it is bound to use figurative (or picture) language. However, there are often reasons why divine truth is not written directly.

- a. Figurative language may be used to emphasize a point (e.g. Lk. 13:32)
- b. It may be used to move one to action (e.g. Rev. 3:20)
- c. It may help the memory (e.g. Mt. 5:13-16)
- d. It may illustrate truth (e.g. Jn. 6:48; 2 Tim. 2:37)
- e. It may be used to clarify spiritual truths (e.g. Gen. 2:7; 'father of mankind')
- f. It may be used as a code (e.g. as used in some parables and prophecy).



Identifying Figurative Language

As a first guideline we should take all biblical language to be ordinary human language unless there are reasons to think otherwise.

Scripture Must Be Interpreted Literally If Possible

It is important to see that Scripture must be interpreted literally. As B. Milne says:

This principle, technically known as the historico-grammatical method, takes the natural, straightforward sense of a text or passage as fundamental. This 'literal' approach must be carefully distinguished from the 'literalistic'. The latter interprets the words of Scripture in a wooden fashion without making allowance for imagery, metaphor, literary form. etc. ; to take an example, 'the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth' (2 Chron. 16:9) teaches God's omniscience but does not teach that a pair of celestial eyes periodically sweep over the globe.

This approach requires that we interpret Scripture according to its original meaning, its literary form and its context. This can mean looking at biblical cultures, customs, languages and literary genre.

Note the following figures of comparison:

Similes And Metaphors

Similes and metaphors are expressions of similarity between two objects or concepts that are, in most respects, unlike. A simile is a form of expression in which a thing is spoken of in comparison with another, using 'as' or 'like', for example, 'He fought like lion'. A metaphor is a form of words in which a thing is spoken of under the name or likeness of something else, for example, 'The ship ploughed through the waves'. Consider these biblical examples:

- a. God is likened to a sun, shield, rock and fortress (Psa. 18:2; 84:11).
- b. Jesus Christ is called a lion, root and lamb (Jn. 1:29, 36; Rev. 5:51).
- c. Jesus represented himself in different ways: as bread, light, a gate or door, a shepherd, resurrection, a road, a vine (Jn. 6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1).
- d. The 'dead' in Lk. 9:60.
- e. The 'body' and 'blood' in Lk. 14:22, 24.
- f. The 'goads' in Saul's experience (Acts 26:14).

Idiomatic Language

The Bible is a Near Eastern book. It is important to appreciate its cultural background, including its languages, which have peculiar expressions and idioms. Eastern languages are full of figures of speech. Further, we need to recognize that words are defined by their usage. This is where even small words can create large difficulties! We can illustrate this by the use of the word 'up' in the English language. We 'look up', 'move up', 'eat up', 'dry up', 'shut up', 'beat up' and 'wash up'! Studies of words and their idiomatic usage are important.

Here are some examples of Hebraisms (or Semitisms) from both Testaments:

The Use Of 'Sons Of' Or 'Children Of'



These phrases indicate people who are associated with certain qualities. For example, 'Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial' (AV), means 'wicked men' (1 Sam. 2:12, NIV). A 'son of peace' (AV) is 'a man of peace' (Lk. 10:6, NIV).

Consider these examples in Ephesians: 'sons of anger'; 'sons of disobedience'; 'sons of light' (Eph. 2:3; 5:6, 8).

The Use Of The Words 'Love' And 'Hate'

The saying of Jesus, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters - yes, even his own life - he cannot be my disciple' (Lk. 14:26) is difficult to accept until we appreciate that 'hate' means 'love less'. When God says, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated' (Rom. 9:13) he is stating that he prefers Jacob before Esau.

Some Absolute Statements Must Be Interpreted Relatively

When Joseph said to his brothers, 'It was not you who sent me here, but God' (Gen. 45:8), he was recognizing the way that God moves so mysteriously in circumstances. His statement does not remove blame from his brothers. Consider Mk. 9:36, 37, Rom. 14:1 and 1 Thess. 4:8.

Sometimes The Names Of Parents Are Used For Their Descendants

'Let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad' (Psa. 14:7). The personal names of Jacob and Israel are applied to the nation of Israel in the OT. They can be used interchangeably as in Hebrew poetry (e.g. Isa. 59:20; Rom. 11:26), or with an emphasis on the good side (Israel) or bad side (Jacob) of the nation's character (e.g. Mic. 3:1).

Sometimes Grandchildren Are Called Sons Or Children

In 2 Sam. 19:24 Mephibosheth is called Saul's son (AV, ASV, RSV) when, in fact, he was his grandson (NIV). Gen. 46:22 states that Rachel had 14 sons, when she had only two, Joseph and Benjamin.

Some Numbers Are Probably Intended To Have A Symbolic Meaning

Ancient languages use numbers significantly. The number ten may indicate 'few', 'many' or 'much' in passages like Gen. 24:55; 31:7 and Dan. 1:20 (note the context). Seven and seventy may indicate completeness. Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah and parts of Isaiah and the book of Revelation feature a type of literature known as apocalyptic. Apocalyptic writing tends to divide time and events into regular periods.

There is a fondness in the symbolic use of numbers (e.g., 1000 may indicate an indefinite long period in Rev. 20:4-7). The number 40 is associated with testing or temptation (e.g. Israel's wilderness wandering, and the temptation of Jesus).

Principle #6: Compare Scripture with Scripture

'The student should compare Scripture with scripture, allowing the Bible to illuminate itself. He should search for passages dealing with the same event or giving the same teaching, for passages with similar teaching, and for passages with contrasting teachings' (R. McQuilkin).



When taking this advice we consider parallel passages, similar ideas, and contrasting ideas.

Parallel Passages

Two or more passages may report the same event or give the same teaching.

Parallel Passages by The Same Author

It is good scholarship to compare the writings of the same author, as an author tends to use similar terms and expressions, as well as repeating or even developing some teaching. This is especially true in the case of the writing of Paul and the teaching of Jesus. Compare Ephesians with Colossians - they stand in close relationship.



Bible Study: As an exercise, compare the texts of 2 Sam. 24:1-25 with 1 Chron. 21:1-30.

Parallel Histories in The Old Testament

The books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles can be compared with advantage. For example, quite often details in a person's life may be filled in by a book, as Chronicles repeats the history of Samuel and Kings (referred to as 1, 2, 3 & 4 Kings in the Septuagint). Chronicles is the last book in the Hebrew Bible.

Parallel Histories in The New Testament

There are four Gospels, which complement each other in giving information about the life and mission of Jesus Christ. Sometimes a Gospel supplies a unique detail which can enhance a story, for example, the fact that the crowd tried to make Jesus a king after the feeding of the 5000 (Jn. 6:15).

Paul's testimony is found three times in Acts (9:1-22; 22:1-21; 26:1-20). Sometimes events in Paul's missionary journeys relate to details in his epistles, for example, Acts 17:1-10 and the Thessalonian epistles.

Old Testament Passages May Illustrate New Testament Ones

- The Lamb Of God

'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (Jn. 1:29, cf. v. 36). John the Baptist was the last of the OT prophets. We need the OT to help our understanding of his message. Consider Gen. 22:1ff. ; Ex. 12:1ff. ; Lev. 4:32-35; Isa. 53:6-7; Jer. 11. 19 (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19; Rev. 5:1ff.). The Epistle to the Hebrews compares the old covenant with the new covenant; the first with the old sacrificial system involving priests and sacrifices, the second with Christ and his 'once for all' sacrifice. Hebrews provides the key for understanding OT types and figures.

- 'Redeemed' And 'Without Blemish'

'You were redeemed ... with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect' (1 Pet. 1:18, 19). This is an important passage for the Lamb of God



theme in the Scriptures. To understand 'without blemish' reference should be made to Exodus 12 and Leviticus 1-5. In the OT 'redemption' represents the ideas of release, deliverance and emancipation. In the law of Moses the word is used in association with a number of social circumstances:

- a. Land could be redeemed (Lev. 25:25-27).
- b. Houses could be redeemed (Lev. 25:29).
- c. Slaves could be redeemed (Lev. 25:47-49).

The book of Ruth provides an example of a kinsman-redeemer. Boaz, as a near relative to Ruth, was prepared to act as a Go'el, and redeem the mortgaged family property and made Ruth his wife. As a type, Boaz represents Jesus Christ as our kinsman-redeemer (see Heb. 2:14). Isaiah prophesied about the Messiah's ministry of deliverance (Isa. 61:1-3; Lk. 4:18-19).

Pay Attention To Parallel Passages

Parallel passages can help in the interpretation of Scripture.

Verbal Parallels

Parallels sometimes help us to understand the meaning of a word or words, for example:

David is called 'a man after God's own heart' (1 Sam. 13:14; cf. Acts 13:22). Was David perfect? No! 1 Samuel 2:35 associates the phrase with faithfulness: 'I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind'. David was concerned with God's will and faithfully carried out his God-given duties.

Similar Ideas

We have already looked at the difficult text that calls the followers of the Lord Jesus to 'hate' their relatives (Lk. 14:26). Matthew clarifies the Hebrew idiom: 'Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me' (Mt. 10:37). The parallel saying helps our understanding and interpretation.

Sometimes it is important to ascertain if two passages are actually parallel accounts, or if two different accounts are intended but have points of similarity. Some modern scholars often equate similar passages as parallel, such as the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain (Mt. 5:1-7:27; cf. Lk. 6:17-49), or the two accounts of the Lord's Prayer (Mt. 6:9-13; Lk. 11:2-4). In the case of the two Sermons, the occasions are different and, in the case of the Beatitudes Matthew's emphasis is spiritual, whereas Luke's is natural.

Contrasting Ideas

Scripture often confronts us with seeming contradictions.

Theological Tensions

How can Jesus Christ be both God and man? How can God be wholly present in one place yet, at the same time, be everywhere present (omnipresent)? How can we reconcile the concepts divine sovereignty and human freedom? How is the Bible God's word and yet be man's work? Such seeming contradictions are theological tensions - they have no rational explanation. In Romans the idea of



God’s sovereign ways reduce Paul to exclaim, ‘Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! (Rom. 11:33).

Contrasting Ideas about The Messiah

The evidence in the NT and its contemporary literature indicates that first-century Jews anticipated the coming of a political-military Messiah. The Essenes in the community of Qumran held communal feasts in anticipation of Messiah coming with his holy angels to exercise judgment. The Zealots looked for the kind of Messiah who would cleanse the land of Romans and bring in the rule of David. It is obvious that the leaders’ knowledge and understanding of Scripture was limited. Isaiah 9:7 and Daniel 7:14 were used to support the view of a triumphant Messiah – but scriptures which spoke of his suffering were seemingly ignored (e.g. the Servant Song of Isa. 52:13 - 53:12).

Principle #7: Identifying Types and Learning From Types

Within the Scriptures there is the use of types in the Old Testament to help us understand New Testament realities. A type is usually defined as a divinely ordained prefiguration in the Old Testament of some New Testament reality. Further, the Old Testament entity must be historically real, and so must that in the New Testament. The correspondence relates in some way to the redemptive work of God, and must show evidence of being established by God.

As we read the stories and study the Scriptures of the Old Testament, we must be very aware of God’s desiring to illustrate and reinforce the principles and realities of our New Covenant living through these OT pictures. God has divinely placed these types in the OT to help us understand the depth and breadth of truth in the New.

For every type in the OT there must lay a clear anti-type in the New. For example there are many narrative stories in the OT story of the wilderness, and these clearly teach us principles of living in the New. Paul even refers to these stories in the entire 1 Cor. 10 chapter, drawing lesson upon lesson from the Old to teach principles in the New.

The Purpose of Types: God has placed typology in the Bible to bring deeper understanding to the truths of the Gospels and Epistles. They are often living illustrations of how we are to relate to God, to one-another, how to walk by and live in faith, etc..

Some Examples of Types:

<u>Type</u>	=	<u>Anti-Type</u>
Wilderness Wanderings	=	The Christian life lived in the flesh
Tabernacle of Moses	=	Pictures of Christ / redemption
David & His Kingdom	=	The Kingdom of God in this age
The Babylonian Captivity leaders	=	Apostolic Teamwork
Moses & the Exodus	=	Personal deliverance or city taking



The Use of Names: Often within the typology of the Old Testament, the meaning of names and numbers are critical. In Hebrew culture, names and numbers were always thought to carry meaning and messages from both God and man. For example in the story of Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, found in 2 Samuel, there is powerful typology that gives incredible revelation of God's great grace and saving power.



Bible Study: Read of Mephibosheth for yourself in 2 Sam. 4.4, ch. 9, ch. 16, ch. 19, ch. 22

What can you learn of God's grace, mercy and love from this story?

Mephibosheth was the lame son of Jonathan who deserved to be done away with by King David as he ascended to the throne, but who was sent for, loved, and cared for as one of the king's own sons. It is a tremendous revelation of God's covenant love and grace, but within the story the names are very powerful. Mephibosheth's name means destroying shame, and he lived in a place called lo-Debar which means no pasture or wilderness. Furthermore, he dwelt in the house of Machir (slavery) the son of Ammiel (the people of God). The picture through this whole story is that when you are separated from the King for any reason you will live a life of destroying shame in a wilderness like existence. Furthermore, you will live in bondage to that which enslaves God's people. But there is good news. There is a great King who loves broken, lame people and He sends His servants searching for them to bring them to His home to live as one of His sons! Wow! All of that from one little OT story.

Principle #8: Understand the Type of Literature or the Genre of what you are reading.

One of the most important things to learning to properly study, interpret and teach the Scriptures is to understand that God not only chose to use men to actually pen the words, but that these men chose to use many different literary forms or literary genre to write God's word within. This is truly one of the more human sides of the Bible.

In order to communicate His word, God moved men to write in narrative history (stories), genealogies, prophecy, laws of all sorts, parables, letters, poetry, proverbs, biographies, etc. In order to properly understand God's word, the student of the Bible must not only know a few general principles to guide them in their studies, but they must also have some basic guidelines for reading and studying the major forms of literary genre in the Bible. You simply cannot approach a narrative history and a parable in the same way. Likewise, a psalm and an epistle of Paul must be examined and studied with a different approach.

For more information of the guidelines for studying the different parts of the Bible, read the follow-up reading article: Understanding the Literary Type or Genre of the Books of the Bible on the PI website.

**Principle #9: Depend upon and Call upon the Holy Spirit for Help**

Above all, the highest principle of truly being a good student of the Bible is the principle of divine illumination. Divine illumination is very simply the Holy Spirit taking clearly revealed truth in the Scriptures and teaching it to you in a living way. He opens your eyes to see the truth and the application of God's word. Jesus said on the last night of His life with His 12 men. . .

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. . . 13
"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth;"
John 14:26, 16:13

It is the role of the Holy Spirit to guide us and teach us all truth. He is a wonderful teacher if we will learn to rely upon Him, call upon Him, and cooperate with Him in His teaching ministry.



Part 4: Bible Study Tools

As we seek to be students and teachers of the Scriptures, we will discover that we will need a few other tools to help us to study the Bible. The most basic tool one needs lies within the right heart and lifestyle. No amount of external tools will replace the internal tools needed to be a good student of Scripture.

The Right Set of Internal Tools

- 1) A hunger for God and His word is the beginning tool of the heart needed to discover the great riches of God for you in the Word.
- 2) A life of prayer to lead you into insight and illumination. The great man of faith George Mueller toward the end of his life said that he had read through the Bible over fifty times with the last 38 times being on his knees. He mixed diligent prayer with study of the Scriptures.
- 3) Humility to learn from others. We cannot set ourselves on an island to learn only from the Bible and no one else. God had placed many great people before us and around us to help us to learn.
- 4) A willingness to obey. Jesus said that if anyone was willing to do His will he would know of Jesus' teaching. John 7.17
- 5) The Holy Spirit as your teacher. This is perhaps the greatest tool needed. Jesus said that when He came, He would teach us all things, He would remind us of what Jesus said, He would guide us into all the truth! John 14.26 & John 16.13

A Good Set of External Tools

Together with the right tools of the heart and the Spirit, we then need a very basic set of Bible Study tools to begin with and if we learn to use them well, we can become very successful students of God's word.

- 1) A Good Bible Translation – The beginning place of all study is to find a good, accurate translation of the Scriptures in your own language. There are many translations that are in an older dialect, but it is much more preferable to have a translation into the most modern, up-to-date dialect found provided it is an accurate translation. If possible, it would be advisable to have this Bible as a good study Bible with different study aids within the Bible itself if one is available in your language.
- 2) A Good Bible Dictionary – A Bible dictionary is a wealth of information to you about the Bible. Within it, you will find introductions and information about each book of the Bible such as: who wrote it, who is the target audience, what was the situation at the time of the writing, when it was written, and why it was written. This is very valuable to you as you study. Secondly, the Bible dictionary will have many helpful things about culture, lifestyles, biblical locations and cities, and major events of the times.
- 3) A Good Concordance – A concordance is a systematic listing of all the places a word is used in the Scriptures. For instance, if you were to want



to study the word 'faith', you could look in the concordance and find all of the references to this word in both the Old and New Testaments. By studying through these references, you could gain much insight into the meaning of the word and what all God has said on the topic. This is a very valuable tool for word studies and theme studies.

- 4) A Good Commentary – The last tool we want to point you to is a good commentary. A commentary is a verse by verse, or chapter by chapter discussion about the Scriptures themselves. It will give you a good overview of what is being taught in the Bible and why. Sometimes, those who have written commentaries in the past, may not hold the same theological views in some areas as you do, so you must be careful as you read these to keep an open heart to what the Scriptures are plainly saying to you. Other than that, a good commentary is a great help to studying God's word.



Application: What Bible Study tools do you currently have? What else is available to you in your language? Where could you obtain them? Do you need to save up and purchase some?



Part 5: A Practical System of Bible Study



Discussion: What is the difference between reading the Bible and studying the Bible? Why should we do both?

Introduction

Observation-based Bible study is the foundational method which is incorporated in all Bible study. In this session we will follow three steps of Observation-based Bible study: observation, interpretation, and application. These are the basic stages of studying the Bible.

Observation: It is asking questions as we read to gain an understanding of the passage, the author, the audience, and the subject.

Interpretation: This is coming to the conclusion of what the author meant when he wrote. What was God saying clearly to them in their day?

Application: If that is what God was saying then to them, what is He saying now to us and what should we do about it?

Observation

Observation is the recording of what may be seen in reading a selected Bible passage. It answers the question, "What does the text say?" The following paragraphs identify procedures that help to determine the meaning of a text.

Observation Requires the Right Mental Attitude

Serious study is work. When approaching the Word of God, one must have patience and determination to keep working until the text is understood. A note of caution should be given here. Do not get lost in the details; divide your time proportionately for all parts of the passage under study. Do not stop with a first glance; go on to ask questions and seek meaningful answers. Do not give equal weight to everything; carefully discern what is more important.



Discussion: Discuss the following:

1. Have you ever discovered something new from your personal Bible study?
2. How does disciplined study help us hear the Holy Spirit?

Use the Basic Questions

Ask these six basic questions of each verse. You may or may not be able to answer all of them, depending on the passage.

1. Who?
 - a. Who wrote this book of the Bible? (If this is not clear in the passage, you may find the answer in the first verses of the book or if not there, it may be found in your Bible dictionary or commentary.)
 - b. To whom was it written?
 - c. List all the people mentioned in the verse or passage.
2. Why?
 - a. Why was the book written? What was the situation it was written to address? (You might find these within the book itself and if not, your Bible dictionary or commentary will help you.)
 - b. Why was the passage written? Does the passage indicate the reasons or motives? (Be careful not to read your own ideas into the passage—instead, read the passage carefully.)
3. Where?
 - a. Where was it written?
 - b. Where is the action in the passage taking place?
 - c. List all the places mentioned in the verse
4. When?
 - a. When was it written?
 - b. When did/does/will this action take place?
 - c. List all the references to time. In what tense (past, present, future) was the passage written?
5. What?
 - a. What are the clear things being said or done in the passage? What is the author saying to his readers?



Discover the Form or Structure of the Passage

1. Kinds of figurative language

Was the author speaking straightforward or is their figurative language involved is a key. Is he using a simile, parable, metaphor, allegory, or some other type of figurative language that must be interpreted? (See prior lessons for these definitions.)

2. Interpreting figurative language

Deciding when the biblical writers were using language figuratively or literally is serious work. It would be a grievous error to ignore one of God's commands by claiming it to be figurative language. On the other hand, to say that every verse in Bible should be interpreted literally leads to some perplexing problems. When Jesus said, "I am the bread of life," He obviously could not have been speaking of Himself as a literal loaf of bread (Jn 6:35).

How can we know the difference between literal and figurative language? Consider the following questions:

- a. Does the passage become absurd or impossible if it is interpreted literally? Example: "All the trees of the field will clap their hands" (Isa 55:12).
- b. Does the passage describe God, who is Spirit, as if He had a physical body and other strictly human qualities? Example: "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear" (Isa. 59:1).
- c. Does the passage state that it is figurative? Example: "Listen to another parable: . . ." (Mt. 21:33).

If none of the above is true, interpret the passage literally.

Find the Key Words

Are there key words or ideas used over and over? Many times there will be clues by the writers because they will use a word many times in just a few sentences. When this occurs, you know the author is trying to communicate something to his readers.

Example: In 1 John 2:15-17 the key word is "world" Write down each time the word occurs and tell what is said about it in that place.



Reflection: Read John 16.13-15 as Jesus speaks about the Holy Spirit. What word is repeated over and over and what is being told to us through this repetition? (He/His – used 10 times) the Holy Spirit is a Person and we must know Him as a Person.



Consider Comparisons and Contrasts

Example: In Psalm 1, to what is the righteous man compared?

Righteous Man	Unrighteous Man

Note the Progression of an Idea or the Flow of Thought

Example: Isaiah 40:29-31

1. “[God] gives strength to the weary” and;
2. “increases the power of the weak.”
3. “youths grow tired and weary” and;
4. “young men stumble and fall” but;
5. “those who hope in Lord . . . renew their strength . . . soar . . . run . . . walk . . .”

Picture the Illustrations

If an illustration is given, try to picture the illustrations in your mind. Example: Read Matthew 9:36-36.

Note Connecting Words and Conjunctions

Example: Galatians 5:19-23

Mark Your Bible as You Read

Note: Many people do not like to write in their Bible. It might be suggested that they write out the text being studied or that they get another Bible in which they can write.

Interpretation

Interpretation is coming to understand the meaning of what has been observed in Bible study. It answers the question, “What does it mean?” This is the key we must come to. What did the author clearly mean to his audience in his day when he said. . . ?

The Process of Interpretation

1. Determine the author's purpose
2. Determine the key thought



- a) What is the author writing about?
- b) What is he saying about this subject?
- c) What is the central idea of the passage? (in one sentence).

The Basic Rules of Biblical Interpretation

- a) Interpret words in harmony with their meaning in the historical and cultural context of the author.
- b) It is important to understand the Bible grammatically before trying to understand it theologically.
- c) When two doctrines taught in Scripture appear to be contradictory, accept both as Scriptural in the confidence that in God's sight they are resolvable.
- d) When figurative language is used, one main idea is applicable; do not try to read too many things into the passage.

THE BIG KEY: What is God saying? What is the truth? What did Paul mean when he said. . .

Application

Application is implementing what has been studied to daily living for the purpose of personal character development and ministry effectiveness. It asks the question, "What does it mean to me personally?" Which of the following areas does it address?

Faith - What does this passage teach me about personal faith? Are there promises that I must claim? Are there truths about God that must be believed? Are there truths about what God says about me that must be accepted and believed?

Attitudes - What do I learn about good or bad attitudes? What are the results of each of these? How can I change a negative attitude? Is there any help for release from negative or destructive attitudes such as fear, worry, anxiety, hatred, resentment, or jealousy?

Actions - What should be my actions? Are there errors to avoid? Actions to be changed?

Sins - What sins are pointed out in my life? Do I need to confess them to God? To my fellow man?

Examples - What examples should I follow or avoid?

Challenges - What are some concrete ways I can apply the challenges in my relationships to family, friends, and my local church?

Service to God - Are there specific things I need to offer to God in service? Are there new ministries I should undertake? Should I surrender new areas to His control and service?



Bible Study: Read John 16.7-16. Use the observation based study method to study this passage. Write out your observations, your interpretation, and your application.

Sources

Arthur, Kay. 1994. How to Study Your Bible. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers.

Jenson, Irving L. 1962. Independent Bible Study. Chicago: Moody Press.

Traina, Robert A. 1952. Methodical Bible Study. Wilmore, Kentucky: Asbury Theological Seminary.

Wald, Oletta. 1956. Joy of Discovery. Minneapolis: Bible Banner Press.

Yohn, Rick. 1982. First Hand Joy. Colorado Springs: NavPress. Part 6: Paragraph Study & Theme Studies



Part 6: Paragraph Study and Theme Study



Application: During this section, we will break into small groups and study a paragraph from Scripture. We will use the Observation, Interpretation and Application methods discussed in Lesson 1.

Principles of Paragraph Study

A paragraph study is the application of bible study methods to a select passage of scripture. Steps to follow:

1. Choose the passage of Scripture you wish to study. Make sure it is a unit containing one main topic. In many Bibles, paragraph or unit divisions are indicated by the use of headings.
 2. Work through the passage using the Bible study methods of observation, interpretation and application.
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Guided Study In Small Groups: Each group is to do a paragraph study of "The Parable of the Sower" in Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23.

(Cross-references: Mk 4:1-28; Lk 8:4-15).

A. Observation

Read the passages, paying careful attention to the details. What kind of literature is this? What are the things being compared?

B. Interpretation

1. What is the seed?
2. Who sows the seed? (Compare with 1Co 3:6)
3. Who is the farmer?
4. What do the different types of soil represent?
5. Describe how the plants grew (or failed to grow) in the different types of soil.
6. What do the "birds" represent?
7. What are the "thorns"?
8. What did Jesus mean by "He who has ears to hear, let him hear"?
9. Read 2 Corinthians 1:18; 2:10-14. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of conversion?



C. Application

Write down one or two ways that you can apply this lesson in your own life this week

For Further Consideration

1. Should we sow only on good soil?
 2. Is there anything we can do to help “break up the soil”?
 - a) Ask God to show you where to sow.
 - b) Spend time praying for God to prepare the soil of the hearts of those you will be witnessing to.
 - c) Pray for those who have already heard the Word, that Satan would not snatch it from them.
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Studying Themes in Scripture

Principles of Theme Study

A. Definition

A theme study is discovering what God says about a subject (or theme) by tracing that subject through a book, the Old or New Testament, or the whole Bible. This method may be used to study a doctrine, an idea, a phrase, a word, or any subject mentioned in the Bible. It enables one to be systematic, thorough and exact.

B. Steps to follow

Although the steps outlined in the Practical System for Bible Study Methods are to be followed, some additional steps are helpful in studying a theme. Before beginning the observation, choose the theme you wish to study. If you have a concordance, use it to make a list of all the references for that theme plus related words (for example joy, rejoice). If a concordance is not available, list the references you know. You may wish to study a whole book by studying a certain theme in that book, for example “love” in I John.

1. Observation: Make summary notes on each verse.
2. Interpretation:
 - a. Consider each verse individually and in context. What is being said about the theme?
 - b. Compare the verses. Does one of the verses help to make another verse clear?
 - c. Categorize.
 - d. Write a summary paragraph about this theme.
3. Application: What should we do based upon what we have learned?



Guided Study In Small Groups: Divide the group into three small groups for practice. Each group will be given sub-themes which they will study, using the principles of observation, interpretation and application. All groups should choose a secretary to record their findings and report back to the large group.

Note to Trainers: Since the participants are not required to have a concordance, they are to list all known biblical references to the assigned questions.

Group 1: Prayer

(Study the following: Matt. 6.5-15, Luke 11.1-13, John 14.13-14, 1 John 5.14-15, James 5.16)

Group 2: Faith

(Study the following: Matt 8.5-10, Matt 8. 23-27, Matt 9.29, Mark 5.34, Rom 1.17, Rom 10.17)

Group 3: Love

(Study the following: Matt 22.37-41, John 13.34-35, Rom 5.5, 1 Cor. 13.1-7, 1 Tim. 1.5, 1 John 3.18)

Note to Trainers: Divide the workshop in three equal time periods: (1) for work in smaller groups,(2) for reporting back and writing summary, and (3) for application in prayer.

Note: All groups are to report their findings to the large group.

Summarizing the Findings of Theme Study

Together the group is to write one paragraph summarizing prayer.

Application of Theme Study

Spend the last minutes praying specifically about some of the things they've learned about prayer.



Part 7: Receiving New Revelation

Definition of Revelation

- To Make Known (Webster's II Dictionary)
- Understanding, Knowledge or comprehension that is gained from a source not naturally accessible to our intellectual minds.
- Discussion

Knowledge that comes because God chose to show us, not because we discovered it out of our own ability.

All True Understanding Comes from Divine Revelation



Discussion: Name a time when God showed you something you did not know previously.

1. The knowledge of God can only come through revelation. Romans 1:19, Matthew 11:27
2. Revelation through Scripture. II Timothy 3:16
3. Revelation through Holy Spirit prompting. John 16:13
4. Revelation through Conscience. Romans 1:19 (NAS)
5. Revelation through Nature. Romans 1:20

Scripture helps us interpret and guide all other revelation.

- A) Scripture is a primary catalyst for revelation.
- B) Scripture is God's standard to test all other revelation.

Any Potential Revelation Must be Tested. The test for prophetic words applies to all forms of revelation.

1. Detect unclean sources of revelation.
 - a. The occult. "You are wearied in the multitude of your counsels; let now the astrologers, the stargazers, and the monthly prognosticators stand up and save you from what shall come upon you" (Isaiah 47:13)
 - b. Delusions. "how long will this be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies? Indeed they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart" (Jeremiah 23:26) Not everyone that [spreads false revelation] is malicious, they are just confused. Sometimes they are walking in their own delusion, thinking they are hearing God when they are not.



- c. Unrestrained desires. Desires are a natural function of the human emotion. Desires are linked with our wishes, aspirations, urges, and expectations. Gone unchecked, desires can cause us to rebel against the will of God in our lives. Have you ever heard anyone use the expression, “yearning desire”? Many times we can so yearn to have something that we will listen for any voice that will align with our desires. False [revelation] can, therefore, come through a desire so unrestrained that we can no longer discern the voice of the Lord over the voice of the enemy or our own flesh.
 - d. Manipulation and control. “Likewise, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people, who prophesy out of their own heart; prophesy against them” (Ezekiel 13:17). Some people receive “deep revelations” that coincidentally gives them personal advantage or control. Be very careful of prophecy, or any other revelation that is manipulative or promotes an effort to establish position and power.
 - e. Immaturity. It is difficult to filter revelation through our own emotions. We must be careful to allow trusted leaders to help us sort out what is from God and what is our own flesh speaking.
 - f. Demons. “And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria: they prophesied by Baal and caused My people Israel to err” (Jeremiah 23:13). Just as the Lord can send angels to bring [revelation], the enemy can also send one of his host to deliver a demonic [revelation].
2. Ask “Does this revelation conform to what we know from scripture?”
 - a. If, while studying scripture, you feel that you have received revelation from God, immediately look to see if other scripture agrees or contradicts your “finding”. If other scripture contradicts your “finding”, it cannot be considered revelation from God.
 - b. If God speaks to you through a prophetic word, a dream or through a prompting of the Holy Spirit, you must always check to see if what you heard agrees with scripture. God will never “reveal” anything that contradicts what he has already revealed through his written word.
 3. Ask trusted leaders to help you discern the truth of your revelation.
 - a. Seek out leaders from your church that are familiar with BOTH revelatory activity AND scripture.
 - b. Wise counsel can help us avoid many pitfalls.

God Intends for Us to Receive “New” Revelation

- New revelation is never new to God nor to scripture; it is only new to us.



- God designed his written word to work hand-in-hand with his Holy Spirit to bring understanding, and ultimately to bring us into relationship with Him.
- Because of God's revelatory work, each time we sit down with scripture, remembering to be faithful and consistent with the text, He can bring brand new understanding that we did not see previously (or could not see).

Closing Comments:

1. God has always moved powerfully through His word. History records that as men and women gave themselves to the study, living, and preaching of God's word, things happened!
2. Ezra 7:10 "For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to practice {it,} and to teach {His} statutes and ordinances in Israel." Where are the Ezra's of our day? Where are those who will mine out the treasures of God's word, apply them to their own lives and then teach with great power that word? Is it you?
3. That is the story of Martin Luther, Jan Hus, John Wesley, and many others. They were students of the word, who came under the teaching of the Holy Spirit!
4. What will you decide? Will you give the time? Will you be a student and then teacher of God's word in your land?

Appendix 1

BASICS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

The following passages can be used to learn what the Bible teaches about basic concepts of Christian life and faith. They are given as a resource which the trainee may choose to use as he or she begins discipling new believers in cell groups, one-on-one, etc.

The Authority of the Bible

Re 1:1-3
Lk 24:27-48
Ps 119:94-118
Ps 119:159-168
2 Pe 1:19-21
1 Pe 1:24-25
2 Ti 3:14-17

Evangelism

Mk 5:1-20
1Pe 3:15-16
2Co 3:1-3
Ac 22:1-21
Ac 4:1-20
Ac 18:24-28
Mk 16:9-20

Forgiveness

Ge 45:4-15
Ps 103:2-18
Mt 6:12-15
Lk 15:11-32
Ep 4:31-32
Mk 11:24-26
Mt 18:21-35

Prayer

Ps 55
Mt 26:36-44
Mt 6:5-13
Mt 5:44-48
Jas 5:13-18
Mk 11:20-26
Ro 8:26-28

Giving

2Co 8:1-5
2Co 9:6-11
Mk 10:17-23
1Jn 3:16-18
Mk 4:24-25
Mt 6:1-4
1Co 16:1-2

New Life in Christ

2Co 5:16-21
Jn 15:5-8
Gal 3:26-28
Ro 8:1-11
Phm 3:7-11
Ro 6:3-11
Col 3:1-4

Bible Study

De 17:18-20
Ps 1
Lk 4:1-13
Lk 4:14-21
Jos 1:7-9
Pr 2:1-5
Pr 4:20-22

Temptation

Ro 6:1-14
Lk 4:1-13
He 2:17-18
1Co 10:13
Ga 6:1-11
Rev 3:7-11
Jas 1:12-15

Self Discipline

Pr 6:6-11
1Pe 1:13-16
Jn 14:21
Ro 12:1-3
Col 3:15-17
Jas 1:19-25
Lk 6:47-49

Living According to God's Plan

Phm 4:6-7
Pr 3:5-6
Pr 16
Ec 2:1-26
Mt 4:18-23
Lk 22:39-42
Jas 4:1-10

Repentance

Lk 5:29-32
Lk 13:1-9
2Pe 3:8-9
Isa 1:10-20
1Jn 1:8-10
Ac 26:20
Jonah 3:1-10

Christian Fellowship

1Th 5:11-15
Lk 22:24-27
Heb 10:24-25
Ep 1:15-23
Ro 12:3-16
Ac 12:5-19
Ac 2:38-47