

The Bible

Introduction to Bible Study

The apostle Peter encouraged the saints to follow the natural example of little babies when he wrote: “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2). The words, “that ye may grow thereby,” carry an important observation. A little baby does not know that it eats to grow, but it is expected that the saint will instinctively know that life is a spiritual progression of growth. The saints needed to be reminded of this, consequently, the verse does not end with the words “desire the sincere milk of the word”.



Reading the scriptures is the first step to Bible study, not glancing over them, but reading what is being said. This is normally a private exercise and how it is done is a personal choice. For some they follow a planned reading schedule, for others they have their own plan, and others read randomly. I suggest reading is best done systematically and with a notebook and pen. This is not study, but simply observation, and when a verse or a concept comes to mind then write it down in the notebook. At this point we are not concerned about how accurate it is, we all change our views on how we see truths in the scriptures. By writing things down and reading consecutively it helps us remember that which has been read. There is also another benefit for in time that same passage will be read again, and the individual might question that which they wrote earlier, or see an expansion of it from having read other passages, or see some new truth. That is when it is exciting. Soon we will want to go beyond reading and begin to actually study.

When our Lord was speaking to the multitudes He said: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (Jn. 5:39). The tense of the word “search” indicates an imperative which is active, and indicates a command which calls for my obedient response. Remembering the Lord spoke the words of God, His words are God’s command to us.

- a) The third clause states: “They are they which testify of me” which informs us that if we desire to know the Lord then there must be the ongoing discipline of searching the scriptures. In Bible study we must never lose sight that Christ is central to every page and passage. God’s purpose is to: “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in Heaven, and which are on earth” (Eph. 1:10). If we miss seeing Christ, either by way of picture, illustration, contrast, or similarity, then we have lost the supreme purpose for the narrative. It is like looking at the Mona Lisa and missing her smile. The supreme reason the scriptures were given was to declare Christ as the exclusive way of salvation through His vicarious sacrifice on the cross at Calvary.

Life teaches us that the more we diligently study, no matter how seemingly elementary the level, we get to know the will of God, and when we put what is learnt into daily life there is spiritual development. Peter puts both spiritual growth and the knowledge of the Lord in one verse when he wrote: “Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). The Lord taught: “If any man will do His (God's) will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (Jn. 7:17).

I never finished grade nine in school and was an average student, but had no interest in study. When God saved me there was a desire to read the scriptures. I did not know how to study the Bible so I bought a concordance and then looked up words. That was good start. In time, when I had a few pounds in my pocket and a Bible Teacher would come to Belfast, at times I would take them out for a meal and ask questions. I would listen to how they developed their messages and expound the scriptures and bit by bit I learnt how to study the Word of God. Many believers are like myself, they cannot go to Bible schools and devote large amounts of time to learn how to study the scriptures. That is not necessarily a hinderance for each of us can be Spirit taught, and as they do at schools, we can use books, messages on the computer, and by setting aside time each week we can be taught of God (Jn. 6:45; 1 Thess. 4:9).

One of the many observations which is almost too evident to be mentioned, yet it must be, is while there are multiple methods to study, there is only one Teacher. In Biblical study we are students seeking to be led into all truth by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:13). Since he is the Author (2 Pet. 1:21), He knows the scriptures better than

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anyone else and only He can enlighten. It is my determined practice that before starting to read or study the word of God, I ask Him to grant me understanding. This was a truth the Psalmist learnt and so prayed: “Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law” (Psa. 119:18). Of course there were passages I could not grasp the meaning of, there still is.

The Lord taught me never to study the scriptures for knowledge, for now I know from Paul that “knowledge puffeth up” (1 Cor. 8:1). Many years ago I wrote myself a little reminder which states, “Never study the Scriptures for knowledge but for a greater understanding of the wonder of divine persons, the vastness of divine purposes, and the ability to worship more acceptably”. The instruction still rings true: “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (Jas. 1. 22).

God expects not only intellectual growth in ones knowledge of the scriptures but also Christlike development in daily life. Such is the object of the divine enlightenment: “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (Jn. 13:17) (cf. Matt. 7:24-25). In conclusion, I quote: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:16)

If an individual has a desire to study the Bible, there are tools which are needed from the beginning.

- a) I suggest several notebooks with the name of the book to be read and studied on each book. That is, one notebook for 1st Peter, another for 2nd Peter, another for Romans, etc. Also a number of pens, they always run out just when you see something noteworthy, so have extra ones. Some people also have several colored pens or markers with which they headline notes or mark their Bibles. I find the colors confusing except as a one color headline and I do not write in my study Bible. I say “Study Bible” because I have two main ones, one for all my study, and the other for meetings.
- b) Nowadays most have a computer and a good Bible program which has the Greek and Hebrew, other translations, search and view features with cut and paste abilities. Personally, I have used the Online Bible for over twenty years. The price is nominal and it is exceedingly easy to use.
- c) There is a need to understand that Bible Study (as opposed to reading what another has said and accepting it without reservation) is a work of research. When Paul and Silas came to Berea and preached, the saints did not take their word as the truth, for we read: “They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). Dr. Luke, when writing to Theophilus, told of how he would write “in order” (Lk. 1:3). Having said that, we need also to lean on the shoulders of those who have done the “legwork”, and having read what they say or write, checking it with the scriptures.
- d) In time there may be the desire to look a little deeper and study a book. I am aware that many will say to start with John or Colossians, and I do understand their thoughts. My suggestion is to start off with small books which are easy to grasp the flow of. There are five books of the scriptures which are only one chapter, Obadiah, Philemon, 2nd John, 3rd John, and Jude. An individual could begin with Philemon and ask the five “W’s; who, what, when, why, and where? While reading the book ask the following questions, and others which may come to mind. When a study has been done on Jude then go to the other books.
 - i) Who:
 1. Was it written by?
 2. Was it written about?
 3. Was it written to?
 - ii) What:
 1. What were the circumstances which required it’s writing?
 2. What Old Testament scriptures are used to substantiate his truths?

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3. What words are used which are peculiar to this passage?
 4. What can we learn about the characters mentioned in the book?
 5. What geographical places are mentioned in the book?
 6. What doctrines are indicated or manifested in the book?
 7. What gospel aspect is taught in the book?
 8. What aspect of the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit is seen in the book?
- iii) When:
1. When was it written and what are the evidences of that date?
- iv) Why:
1. Why did Paul write to Philemon? That is, “What was being asked of the individuals?” and “What did the writer desire to see happen?”
- v) Where:
1. Where was it written from?
 2. Where was it going to? and with this, “How would the travelers get to where they were going?” and “Was it a long or short journey?”

In time these questions will become second nature and will be done automatically without having to think of them. Of course because we are human, it is good to keep a list of them handy for to keep ourselves on track in the pursuing of the knowledge of the word of God.

May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13

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