

The Bible

Basic Truths Concerning Bible Study

Introduction

As in any avenue of study there are certain qualifiers which must be met. When the subject is the scriptures there are some which are fundamental.

- a) The first qualification is, the individual is born again. The scriptures are clear, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). However, it is a fact that God does speak to those who are unsaved through the scriptures, but the full understanding of them cannot be grasped except by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. For instance, for many there was a time when we perhaps read John 3:16 and suddenly “saw” the truth of it. We were enlightened as to the need, the way of salvation, and that which we had to do. Unless an individual is born again the scriptures will be just a series of books about ancient people, etc.
- b) Secondly, the individual must believe that the Holy Bible **IS** the word of God. It is not a book of suggestions for living, nor is it a scientific manual. It is a Spirit begotten book. It is God’s manual telling why man is where he is spiritually, the remedy for sin, the way of salvation, the glorification of Christ, and the future. Since it is impossible to give a perfect English or any other language translation, we must use various helps of very learned men who knew the ancient languages and were well grounded in the fundamentals of Biblical truth. We need books such as Alford’s Greek New Testament, W.E. Vine’s dictionary of Greek words, “Robertson’s Word pictures”, etc. Some of the excellent translations I am aware of are Young’s Literal, Darby, Rotherham, and the Companion Bible (which is unbeatable in information), and Weymouth. Also, there is differences in translations and paraphrases.
- c) Another is teachability or having a meek (Jam. 1:22; 1 Pet. 2:2) teachable spirit (Psa. 25:4; 27:11; 119:12). This is something which is very hard for many of us have been taught certain “truths?” and it is very hard to question the possibility that the information we have been taught is not according to the scriptures. For instance:
 - i) Some have been taught that the memorial feast or Lord’s supper is the only true assembly gathering since the other meetings are open to the public to attend. Is this biblically correct and what are the scriptures for and against this argument.
 - ii) Some places have a man begin the remembrance meeting with a five minute meditation by a brother. Is that wrong, would that make us feel uncomfortable? If so why?
 - iii) Should the meetings always begin with a hymn? Let us not take an Old Testament verse to support New Testament practices. We cannot use Psalm 100:4 to support the starting of the meeting with a hymn. It is a nice way to start but there is no scripture to indicate we should always, “enter His courts with a hymn”.
 - iv) As I wrote, “We have been taught certain things concerning these and it is very hard to start with a clear mind, open to the teaching of the Holy Spirit”.
- d) “How do you or anyone study the Bible?” is a question asked by many over the years. First we will look at “Why Study The Bible”.

Why Study The Bible?

Bible study is, “An attempt to Listen to God”, nothing more and nothing less. It must never be to get an intellectual knowledge for knowledge puffeth up (1 Cor. 8:1) so that we glory in what we think we know. Since study is, “An attempt to Listen to God”, how is that done?

Admittedly, this is quite difficult because born again believers carry a spiritual background, church affiliation, and doctrines taught by others which color how an individual will understand a passage. Due to these “colorings”, perhaps unconsciously we cherry pick passages that agree with, or seem to agree with our practices. To be completely free from all “colorings” and open only to the Holy Spirit’s teaching is exceedingly difficult. We need

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the Holy Spirit who will seek to guide us into all truth (Jn. 16:13). He will guide, Precept upon precept; line upon line” (Isa. 28:10).

However, it is my belief that the supreme reason for Bible study is to glorify God while being a sojourner on the earth. This was the example of the Lord (Jn. 17:4). By the study of the scriptures the individual glorifies God by being able to worship God more intelligently, remember Christ more worthily, and learn dependence on the Holy Spirit more fully. At times the Holy Spirit will teach directly, and at other times, He will use teachers and discussions, but He is not limited to these methods.

How Does An Individual Study The Bible?

Bible Study is to factually observe and reason the passage under consideration. It is reading what is on the lines and not reading between the lines, it is observation, observation, observation. It is similar to the diagnosing of a doctor or reporter who asked questions. Miles Coverdale who translated the scriptures (but expanded) wrote, “It is important to note:

- a) Who is the speaker, who is he /she speaking to, who are they speaking about?
- b) Where are they when making this statement, geographically, historically?
- c) What is the reason for the statement, question being made, is it the answering an attitude or a question spoken?
- d) What aspect of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the gospel is presented?
- e) How is the thought flow developed and what is the goal of the book?”

The most important aspect of Bible study is context for, “a verse without the context is a pretext”, and the context is the “environment” in which a passage is found. It is irrelevant if it is a verse, chapter, parable, sermon, exposition, or any other avenue of study, context is vital for a true understanding of the truths of the passage. For instance, the word “suit”, it can refer to a set of clothing made of the same material, a set of sails for a ship, the suitability of a person for a job, or a set of cards. If someone were to say “I got a suit”, it would leave one wondering, “What is he speaking about?” However, if he said, “Johnny got a new job, the manager said he was a perfect suit for it”, the listener would know from context what meaning to put on the word “suit”. Thus the importance of context. More will be said on this later.

Identification: This is to seek to determine the major divisions of the book. At the weekend I did a jigsaw with my granddaughter. The first thing we did was find the corners, they were the first boundaries. Then having found the four corners we began to look for all the pieces with straight edges, and when they were all put in place we had the complete outline of the picture. Only then did we begin to focus on individual parts of it. The same with Bible Study. For instance:

- a) In reading Obadiah it is observed that there are two “corners”. In verse 10 the prophet wrote, “For thy violence”, and he gives the reasons for the judgments of the previous verses. Then in verse 17 he begins a new section with the word, “But upon Mount Zion”, and then presents a contrast between what God will do to Edom and Israel. Thus the book is in 3 major parts, judgment announced (vv. 2-9); judgment justified on Edom (vv. 10-16), and blessing for Israel (vv. 17-21).
- b) In observing a passage, look for repetition of words or phrases, i.e., in Amos there is the repeated statement, “For three transgressions . . . and for four” (Amos. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). This leads to the questions, who is God speaking to, are all the transgressions the same, is there any place where the statement is not said?

The next paper will deal with context in detail.

May the Spirit of truth lead us deeper into the wonderful truths of His word.

. . . . Rowan Jennings

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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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