

Dear Friends,

Why study the Bible? What should be our goal in this study? Scripture richly informs and answers these questions. When people try to wrest the inspired stated purpose of Scripture from a thorough furnisher for every good work to the man of God into "God's roadmap to heaven," they confuse Scripture, and often become confused in their study. When we keep God's stated reading audience and purpose for Scripture clearly in our minds, so many of the passages that were formerly confusing become simple and instructive.

One of the first distinguishing differences we will notice between these two views of Scripture should clearly direct our thoughts. If you think the Bible is God's roadmap for lost sinners to use to "Find heaven" for themselves, you will gladly regard every admonition to Christian living in the Bible as one more way for you to gain more credit for yourself and to buy "Another star for my heavenly crown." All of Christian service and life in this view of Scripture is on self. If you regard Scripture as God's wise instruction to "...every good work" for you, the man or woman "of God," you will joyfully regard Scripture and your obedience of its teachings as your guidebook for living your life to the glory of God and in service to His people, not at all for personal gain. Jesus' first prerequisite to following Him is "deny self," not find a way to promote self.

How do I live my life to encourage and help other believers in their struggles and faith? First, we need to strip away from our thinking any significant belief that does not originate and manifest its clear example in Scripture. If I've adopted a world view that I didn't get from Scripture alone, I need to drop it immediately. My life needs to be a pure and noble reflection of Jesus and His "Golden Rule." (Matthew 7:12 KJV)

A notable and life-transforming revelation of this week's study passage appears in the simple words, "...that ye study to be...." Paul did not write that we study to learn, but to be. Our up-front objective should be to study the Scriptures, fully knowing and praying that the Lord so reveal its truth to us that He uses it to change our lives, what we do and how we do it - and why.

Lord help us to so study!

Joe Holder

God's Design for Study—Lifestyle, Not Information

And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing. (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 KJV 1900)

On occasion I've reminded young preachers—and myself—that our first goal in Bible study is not to find the ideal text to preach next Sunday to the church, but to learn how the Lord teaches us to live our lives for Him and to His glory. When believers truly believe Scripture's own testimony of its purpose, "...thoroughly furnished unto all good works," and its divinely intended audience, "...the man of God," (2 Timothy 3:17 KJV) we discover an incredible and simply taught wealth of information to teach us about life in fellowship with the Lord and for His glory. Yes, preachers can slip into a counter-productive habit of studying for the next sermon instead of studying for God's direction and answers to their own life's problems.

And that ye study to be quiet. The point is obvious. "...study to be," not "...study to know...." Sadly, we often love to hear ourselves talk more than listen to others. If I am one of those people who enjoys talking a bit too much, how do I learn to control my mouth and to use my ears more? Start with this lesson. For this particular "Vice," I strongly recommend a thorough study of James. He writes much about the dangers of careless speech.

When Paul wrote that we should "...study to be quiet," what did he intend that we study? If we keep Scripture's self-described audience and purpose in mind (2 Timothy 3:17), we have the answer. We are to study Scripture. A faithful and ongoing study of Scripture will eventually begin to invade our lifestyle. It holds the potential to change how we think and act.

Paul carefully used the words directed to communicate the Holy Spirit's meaning and message, not Paul's ideas. He wrote that we are to "study," not speed read. We are to probe every passage to learn its intended meaning for our faith, as well as for our conduct. The Lord intended Scripture to transform our lives. We do not study to find a way to rationalize not obeying Scripture. We study to learn how to practice it so fully that it changes our life.

We may notice the subdivisions in Psalm 119 casually, but I doubt that most of us regard them seriously in our studies. Each of those "Mini-Psalms" teaches a comprehensive lesson. Consider this example.

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes. With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word. (Psalm 119:9-16 KJV)

We are familiar with two verses from this reading, Verses 9 and 11.

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.

Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Great verses, great thoughts, but the whole sub-Psalm fills in some gaps and reinforces this thought. Beginning to end, these verses teach us the compelling necessity of regular, devoted, and faithful time with Scripture, all intended to respect, to believe, and to obey its teachings and thereby transform our lives from self-focused to God-focused and other-focused. The lesson anchors our minds in fellowship with the Lord, His approval and glory. In this point, David and Paul in our study passage wholly agree.

There are times when Scripture teaches believers to speak up, not be silent, and other times when the Word teaches us, as our study passage, to be quiet. We can't "Listen" when we are talking. And there are seasons in life where we desperately need to be very quiet and listen for what the Lord says, not chatter away and ignore Him. I suspect that many sincere believers seldom truly "Hear" what the Lord is communicating to them for this reason. They fail to stop and listen, just listen for His words and guiding grace.

And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left. (Isaiah 30:21 KJV)

It might be easy to miss a "voice behind thee" unless you expect it and are listening for it. The louder we talk the less we are likely to hear that "Behind us voice." Ah, we need Scripture to show us the way to truly "...be quiet."

... and to do your own business. Everything that happens in the church, the family, or in my circle of friends is not my "own business." Scripture warns us against being seen as a "busybody."

For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. (2 Thessalonians 3:11-12 KJV)

I relish the contrasts in Scripture. They teach us wisely. What does Paul contrast in these verses? On one side of the contrast, he names "disorderly," "working not at all," and "busybodies." On the other positive side, he emphasizes "...work...with quietness" and "eat their own bread." From Scripture, we learn to know what our business for the Lord is, and we also learn that we should keep our minds trained on our business, not chase our brother's or sister's "Business." The contrast adds clarity to the point already made. If we hope to practice this lesson, we must begin with quietness. We must "study to

be quiet,” a lesson we learn from Scripture alone, and build on that foundation. If we could name only one habit as the Lord’s assignment to us, truly our “Business,” from Scripture, what would it be?

Let all things be done unto edifying. (1 Corinthians 14:26b KJV)

To “edify” my brother or sister means to grow them stronger and healthier in their faith than they are presently. Now that is our “...own business.” Can any of us truly apply this filter to our mouths—indeed, to our whole lives—and think we comply with its teaching? I rather doubt it. However, this doesn’t excuse us to give up and stop trying. It motivates us to clarify our goal and to work harder than ever to practice this teaching.

What is your personal “Business” in the church? How did you come to this conclusion? “I like....” “I want....” Any “Me-centered” explanation fails the Bible test. How should we determine our personal “Business” in our church? Paul answered the question. No different from “...study to be quiet,” he applies the same rule to this question. We are no less to study to “...do your own business.” Scripture, specifically New Testament Scripture, defines every believer’s Biblical “Business” in the Lord’s church.

Many years ago I observed a unique pattern in several young and highly profitable ministers. To a man, they each lived daily with a burning passion to spend time, lots of time, with their Bibles. The Holy Spirit was guiding them to do what Paul taught the Thessalonians in our study passage. The prevalence of this pattern was so consistent that I would question a man’s calling to preach if he failed to demonstrate that passion—and didn’t work to practice it. If a man is too casual about studying his Bible, he will not manifest the fire of a genuine calling when he enters the pulpit.

...and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you. How do we spend our daily time, in life and in our home church? What do we make time and space to do? If we grow our discipleship strong and healthy, we go to Scripture regularly to learn how to work with our own hands, as well as what to do with them. Paul didn’t write a single word about our studying to direct other believers how and what to do with their hands. When a believer in a church assumes the role of directing others in their work, he/she *de facto* neglects the work the Lord assigned to him/her. If we truly strive to accomplish the three objectives Paul outlined in this lesson, we shall have no time whatever to busy ourselves with what our brothers or sisters should do. Our personal life and conduct should show other believers by example how to live and “Do” our faith.

That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing. The strongest “Evangelism” influence a healthy church can possibly nurture in its members is to teach them and encourage them to live their faith in the trenches of their lives. People outside the church have seen more than a few pretend Christians who speak loudly about their faith, but who come up short in the performance of it. If they see a believer who honestly and conscientiously works at living his faith in service to the Lord and other people, the contrast will be dramatic. And if that faithful believer is you, they will want to learn more about you and your faith. The strongest witness to our faith appears, not in our memorizing our Articles of Faith and studying to affirm and defend them, but in our living our faith consistently.

The lifestyle difference between a person living “For Number one,” for self above all others, and living for God and for the service of others, is dramatic. Nothing could get an observer’s attention more quickly. If they see, that God-centered and other-centered-other-serving mindset in you where you live your life daily, rest assured; they will see the difference. Don’t worry about getting their attention. If you live that lifestyle you will, have their attention.

Think about your church and the various interactions each member has with people who are not members. People in the neighborhood, business people who work for the church, relatives of members, business associates of members, the list is long and varied. How faithfully do you truly practice your faith when you interact with these people? If they never read a Bible, would your life give them a respectable “Translation” of Biblical faith and lifestyle? Encourage them to attend and learn more. Try it. You’ll be amazed at the results if you truly practice a hearty Biblical faith.

Elder Joe Holder