

Students of the Bible

Motivation

Before we get into some of the principles and practices of Bible Study, let us look at why we should study the word of God. There are many, many reasons; we will look at just a few of them here. It is recorded in Psalms 119:105, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." We will stumble in spiritual darkness, as our society in general is doing, if we do not know God's word.

We have formidable enemies in Satan, the world system, and our own sinful natures. We read in Ephesians 6: 17 that one of the most important components of our spiritual armor is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." We cannot fight our enemies, unless we know how to use our weapons.

The word of God is our very spiritual food. We will starve and will be spiritually weak, unless we regularly feed on God's word. Our Savior, Himself made this plain when He spoke in Matthew 4: 4, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Peter echoed this when he wrote in 1 Peter 2:2, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby..." Job thought the word of God so important that, even when he was under great trials and when he could not feel God's presence, he still said in Job 23:12, "Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food."

It is impossible for the Christian to be complete unless he or she is often in God's word. We are usually not aware of how well equipped we will be to face life's trials, when we are familiar with His word. This is very plainly seen from what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The word translated "perfect" here is *artios* (ar'-tee-os), and means "complete." The word translated "thoroughly furnished" is *exartizo* (ex-ar-tid'-zo) and means "to equip fully."

To really get a picture of how important the word of God is, one should read the entire 119th Psalm. This longest chapter in the Bible is entirely concerned with the word of God. With its 176 verses, Psalm 119 has more verses than 14 Old Testament Books and 17 New Testament Books. This shows the great importance that God places on His word.

We must remember that Satan is our great enemy. Knowing how valuable God's word is, he will try to interfere with our reading and studying it. If he cannot succeed in keeping us from God's word, he will try to get us to misunderstand it. When the Lord and Satan had their encounter in Matthew 4, Satan also quoted Scripture, but he used it in the wrong way, and the Lord Jesus countered with another Scripture which put things in the right perspective. We must know the word of the Lord well. We should strive to get more than just a superficial knowledge of it.

Confidence

If we are to really be able to use the word of God properly, we must have confidence in it. We must be assured that it is indeed, the verbally inspired word of God. If we are born again we will have a love for God's word, because the same truth that is contained in the Bible is written in our hearts. We find this taught in Hebrews 8:10, "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people..."

Besides this internal evidence of the reliability of Scripture, there is much compelling external evidence. First of all, the Bible itself claims to be inspired. There are two primary passages that teach this as well as many others that support it. One of these is 2 Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness..." The other is 2 Peter 1:21, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." The doctrine of **inspiration** is that God used men to write the Bible, but He exercised such control over them that they wrote, word for word, exactly what He directed them to write. God did not merely inspire ideas, He inspired words.

We can use the acronym **MAPS** to show evidence of inspiration. The "M" stands for "manuscripts." There are many more manuscripts of Scripture than for any other ancient book. For the New Testament there are around 5000 manuscripts that are available.

The "A" stands for "Archaeology." No archaeological discovery has ever disproved anything in the Bible, but many of them have confirmed the Scriptures.

The "P" stands for "Prophecy." This is very exciting. Only God can foretell the future. He does that in minute detail in many, many instances.

The "S" stands for "Symmetry." The Bible was written over a period of some fifteen hundred years, by some forty human authors. But there is such a unity in the Scriptures that they support and interpret each other. The Bible is so unified, that it is possible for Bible students to develop what is known as Systematic Theology, which is just another way of saying that the Bible can be studied by subjects. The Scriptures, properly understood, never contradict each other.

Closely allied to the doctrine of inspiration is that of **Providential Preservation**. This means that the Lord has providentially preserved His word down through the centuries until the present time. We believe this doctrine because the Bible itself teaches it. One place among many where this is taught is in Psalms 12:6-7, "The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever."

This word that our Lord has providentially preserved, has been translated into many languages. By far the most reliable translation in the English language is the King James Version. This is true for two primary reasons. The KJV is translated from the most reliable manuscripts. The second reason is that the KJV was translated by using the most reliable translation process and was translated by extremely devout and able translators.

Therefore, when we hold an accurate translation, like the KJV, in our hands we can be assured that we are holding the verbal, plenary, inspired (all of it is inspired) word of God!

Methods of Bible Study

Before we look at methods we must utter a word of caution. No matter how much we study we must realize that we are completely dependent on the Holy Spirit if we are to understand the Scriptures. We must constantly pray the prayer of Psalms 119:18, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." We are just as dependent on Him to show us the meaning of the word of God as were the ones on the road to Emmaus, of whom it is recorded in Luke 24:32, "And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?"

Having said this, we must be willing to work hard to understand the word of God. When we are in school, preparing for a career, we diligently study because much is at stake. Considering that God's word is the most important book we will ever confront, it behooves us to put forth diligent effort as we read and study it. Although this is primarily for ministers of the gospel, the principle is true for each child of God what is written in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

When we first begin to read and study we may not know much, but God will reward our diligent efforts. We are obligated to grow in our knowledge of the Scriptures. We need to grow so that we can glorify God more perfectly, worship more correctly, be guided in our lives, and made helpful to others. The author of Hebrews indicted his readers of being spiritually lazy in Hebrews 5:11-14, "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

Reading

Even though Bible Study is vital, there is no substitute for simple Bible reading. Every child of God should read in the Bible every day. If you don't have this habit, you should develop one. The best time is at the beginning of the day. This is the way to get the day started right. Since the entire Bible is the inspired word of God, we should read the entire book. However, some parts are more pertinent than others. Proverbs and Psalms should be read often.

To help understand what you are reading, it would be helpful to read the summary or outline of a book before you read it. You can find such outlines in study Bibles, Bible handbooks, like the *Halley's Bible Handbook*, and others.

Memorizing

I highly recommend memorizing of the Scriptures. This is both a good spiritual exercise and a good mental exercise. There are three ways that I suggest one should memorize. Memorize Scriptures concerning certain subject matter. For example, each believer in grace should memorize several Scriptures on each of the subjects contained in the acrostic TULIP. T-Total Depravity; U-Unconditional Election; L-Limited Atonement; I-Irresistible Grace; P-Preservation of the Saints.

We should also memorize Scriptures that help us to live as we should. Suppose we are having a problem with some particular sin. David addressed this in Psalms 119:11, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." A husband should memorize Scriptures that pertain to that subject. One having a problem with his tongue could memorize Scriptures that address that subject. As you can see, the prospects are virtually endless. If one has a problem with worry, nothing could be better than memorizing Scriptures like Isaiah 26:3, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."

The third way to memorize would be to memorize entire chapters or even books. Many of the Psalms would be very valuable committed to memory.

The secret to significant memory work is consistency. A few verses a week, on a consistent basis, would add up quickly. If an individual memorized just one verse a week, that would add up to over fifty in a year and over five hundred in ten years!

Meditating

After one has done some reading and memorizing, now he will have valuable material on which to meditate. To meditate is to think deeply. It is written in Genesis 24:63, "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide..." The Hebrew word translated "meditate" here means "rehearse, go over a matter in one's mind, muse pensively." It has the idea of talking to oneself, either silently or under one's breath. Obviously the person meditating is in deep thought.

In this day when we are over stimulated by so many informational and communications devices, it is seldom that we mentally "get off by ourselves" and really think. What a rich dividend it would pay us if we periodically got away from everyone and everything and just thought deeply and prayerfully on God's word. Our dear Lord found it necessary to do this. We read of Him in Mark 1:35, "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."

Meditation on the word of God is a beautiful thing. When we deeply and unhurriedly think on the glorious truths contained in the word of God, He often reveals to us some wonderful things. David wrote in Psalms 104:33-34, "I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD."

Study

We have considered Bible reading, memorizing, and meditating. Now let us look at Bible study itself. Each child of God should be a diligent student of the Bible. You should know what you believe and why. Your knowledge of the Bible should not be second hand. It is only right that you should respect your parents and your pastors and be inclined to believe what they believe. After all, God has put you under their care and authority. As you grow older, however, you need to make the things you have been taught your own. You need to confront God's word for yourself. You need to be like the "noble Bereans" of whom it is written in Acts 17:11, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." You need to have "convictions" of what you believe, not just "preferences."

There are many ways to study the Bible, but they can basically be summed up in two. Study by subjects and study by books. There are many tools that are available to aid in Bible study. I will mention just a few of them. As I unfold this subject, I would like to encourage each of you to begin to build a good Biblical library. Make it a priority to buy useful books and software that will aid you in your study.

Some useful tools are concordances: A very useful one is *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*. Every word in the Bible is listed here. This is a good way to begin to study by subjects. For example, say you want to study the love of God. Just look up the word for love in *Strong's* and begin to run references. *Strong's* also has a Hebrew dictionary for the Old Testament and a Greek dictionary for the New Testament which is numbered so that the reader of only English can make use of them.

There are also many good study Bibles with a lot of useful tools. Over the years I have grown fond of *The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible*.

There are many systematic theologies which are available. The soundest, in my opinion, is *Commentary on the Holy Scripture* by John Gill. Gill is a little hard to read in places, but he is so rich and sound, it is worth the effort. There are also more modern commentaries that are very useful. Of course, when reading any book that is written by sinful man, one must "eat the chicken and spit out the bones." Only the Bible is completely free from error.

Instead of listing a number of commentaries I would advise you to ask your pastor or some other trusted student of the Bible to guide you in your selection of commentaries and other books.

There are many Bible programs and other software that is available for those who use computers to aid in Bible Study. I primarily use three programs. The first is *God's Word for Windows*. This is a very simple and useful program. Using it, I can usually find a passage of Scripture faster than I would if I were trying to find it in my Bible. I can also use it to search for words and phrases. I use it to cut and paste, when I am writing an article.

Another program that I use is *Online Bible*. It has many useful features, including a number of commentaries and other books. It also makes available *Strong's Concordance*. My personal favorite Bible program is *SwordSearcher*. I use this one all the time. It has many, books and commentaries. One of our brethren at Grace Chapel, Regie Rhodes, has made it possible to put many works written by Primitive Baptists and others on this program. He would be glad to let you know how to download a wealth of material, if you get the *SwordSearcher*.

It is also possible to use the internet while studying the Scriptures. Type in a verse or a subject and all kinds of material becomes available.

To sum up, with all the tools available today, there is no excuse for one not to engage in fruitful Bible Study. As you begin to study and ask questions of your pastor and others, you will become more and more skilled in studying the Scriptures. You just need to get started and to stay with it!

On a very practical level, I want to make a few suggestions. First, keep what you study. Make notes. Your memory will fail you. Write down what you are learning. Even when listening to sermons, it is good to take some notes. When Jesus fed the multitudes with a few loaves and fishes, He said in John 6:12, "When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." God speaks to us in our study and when we listen to sermons, and we too often lose much of what He has given us.

When we have compiled our sermon notes and the results of our reading and studying, then we should develop and use a filing system. This can be done on either a computer, or a hard copy, or both. The filing system should be very simple and easy to use. Basically it should consist of two components. First, we should have an alphabetical file, in which we file material by subjects. Under this we would have files on "love," "predestination," "the tongue," "marriage," baptism," etc. The other file would consist of all 66 books of the Bible. Sometimes, we may include a listing in both files. For example, if we were studying the life of Abraham, we might have a file on "Abraham" in our alphabetical file. But we would also file this information in the "Genesis" file, the "Romans" file, and maybe others that contained material on Abraham.

As you begin to seriously study the Bible and learn more and more, your enjoyment and excitement will increase. After all, you are studying the only book that God inspired, the only one that is completely true. My dear pastor, Elder E. C, Holder, who baptized me on July 18, 1954, used to preach "These truths will stand when the world is on fire!"

Studying the Scriptures is like putting together a puzzle with several hundred pieces. When you begin, you may be a little confused and wonder if the puzzle will ever make sense. However, if you persist, and patiently work, the puzzle will begin to take shape and you will become more and more confident and excited. Get to work on your puzzle. These puzzles usually form a picture of something or someone. As you begin to study the Bible, you will discover that as you complete more and more of this puzzle you are seeing the beautiful picture of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Hurry up and get to work!!!