

Bible Study Course Introduction to the Bible

V. How to study the Bible

We have now looked at many aspects of the Bible – authority, revelation, inspiration; its aim and scope; its structure and growth; the text and its transmission; the history of the English VSS etc. It remains for us to consider the way we should approach the personal reading and study of God's Word.

I. The need to be careful not to substitute books on or about the Bible for the Bible itself!

This is a danger anyone can fall easily into – reading and studying books on or about the Bible, and not the Bible itself! Such books of course, have their place, but if substituted for the Bible, they become positively dangerous.

The thing to remember and do is to READ and study God's Word itself above all else

It is a strange thing that we often have an aversion to reading the Bible – yet we can spend hours on newspapers, novels etc, or Christian books but not the Bible itself! Nevertheless Bible study can become not only vital and valuable, but enthralling, if approached in the right way.

Thus the first things to remember are:

- i. We must read God's Word itself
- ii. Determination is needed to ignore feelings and make time for it.

II. The need to take Bible reading and study seriously.

We must:

SEARCH or INVESTIGATE

Acts 17:11 God's Word needs to be searched out and thoroughly investigated. It is like a mine of precious things.

MEDITATE

Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2. We need to give time for reflection and much thought upon God's Word. It is food to be digested.

COMPARE

1 Cor 2:13; 2 Peter 1:20; 2 Tim 2:15. We need to compare Scripture with Scripture, remembering it is an unfolding revelation.

OBEY

James 1:22; John 7:17; God's Word is to be obeyed! There will never be any further light until light given is obeyed. God's Word is not to be trifled with!

III. The need continually, in Bible reading and study, of prayerful reliance upon the Holy Spirit.

The Bible is mere literature to the natural mind - a great mass of religious law, story and doctrine. Its real meaning is hidden to the natural man. Indeed, it is a closed book. 1 Cor 2:12-14 cf also 2 Cor 3:14-16 Hence our need of the Holy Spirit John 16:13, 14 cf 14:26 Eph 1:16-18 and 1 John 2:27. Never study the Word of God without first praying for the Holy Spirit's gracious ministry of guidance and enlightenment.

IV. The need of humility in our approach to the Bible.

When we come against some thing we don't understand in God's Word, and it does not become clear after asking the Lord for understanding, leave it for the time beings. Concentrate on what the Lord is showing you. In His time, you will be given understanding on the difficulty.

V. The helpfulness of Bible aids.

e.g. of The Concordance or Word Dictionary. It is better to invest in the more comprehensive type Youngs. We need to remember that all are built on AV wording. Note also Vine's Dictionary Words, and Bullinger.

Bible Dictionary. This is invaluable if you would understand Biblical matters e.g. Customs etc

English Dictionary. This will often help us in our understanding.

Marginal references. These are best in RV and ASV. They are invaluable e.g. Exodus 13:21 mg. refs. Also footnotes RV, ASV, and RSV for alternative meanings or variant readings.

VI. Devotional reading of the Bible

We can never over-emphasize the need to regard God's Word as our spiritual food. We thus need to take some part of it each day and thoroughly digest it.

It is good to have a definite scheme or plan of reading rather than be haphazard. E.g. There are many schemes you can choose from or take one book and read some verses per day.

Give time for reflection over your daily passage; look up the marginal references; find out the meaning of the words, which are important. Here the ASV (even JND) are important VSS. The Amplified can be VERY helpful here too! Indeed if it is a short passage, comparing the various VSS can be most helpful and instructive.

This is an essential form of Bible study and reading if we would ever grasp the overall theme or meaning of particular books. In this kind of study, we need to take a book and read it right through from beginning to end without a break, ignoring chapter and verse altogether. Some of the smaller books and letters take very little time to read through, e.g. Ephesians, 1 Peter etc. Even a large book like Job only takes two hours.

It is however, hard to read the Bible like this in the AV or even the RV. For the NT Phillips is very helpful. For the OT, the RSV and the Living Bible. Read through a book in these different VSS and gradually you will grasp the overall theme.

In this type of study, some understanding of authorship, date and background is often helpful.

VII. Analytical study of the Bible

This is an absolutely exhaustive way of studying God's Word, and one of the most valuable. It is not so much concerned with the book and its overall theme, rather the meaning of each phrase. Thus it is a verse by verse, phrase by phrase method of study, using cross references, concordances, and other VSS.

VIII. Other ways of studying the Bible

1. Topical e.g. Types or symbols (dove, vine); places (Hebron, Jordan); events (Exodus etc); occurrences of a certain word (worship, glory, etc)
2. Biographical – e.g. Demas, Philemon 24; Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:10; David compared with his Psalms.
3. Prophecy – Messianic and otherwise; fulfilled and unfulfilled.

In every way God's Word can meet us. It is seed which will grow and bear fruit (Matt 13:19ff.); it is milk when we are young (1 Peter 2:2); it is solid food when we are older (Heb 5:14); it is a lamp to guide our feet (Psalm 119:105); it is a mirror in which we can see ourselves (James 1:23); it is a fire that burns and purifies (Jeremiah 23:29); it is a hammer that breaks what must be broken (Jeremiah 23:29); it is a laver in which we are washed and kept clean (Eph 5:26); it is a sword for defense and for victory (Eph 6:17).

Halford House Cassettes

CBS 79/1 how to study the Bible (a)
CHB79/2 how to study the Bible (b)

Questions

1. What, would you say is the greatest danger which faces us as we come to study the Bible?
2. What are the main difficulties which we must overcome if we are to study God's Word meaningfully?
3. What Bible aids do you find to be most helpful?
4. What is our spiritual food, and what must we do each day to be properly fed spiritually?
5. What is the difference between Comprehensive Study of the Bible, and Analytical Study of the Bible?
6. Have you ever tried Meditation of the Bible? If so, has it helped you, and how?
7. In which ways can God's Word meet us?
8. Which are the four things we must do if we are to undertake serious Bible reading and study?
9. Do you take notes or write out passages of the Bible in your own reading and study of God's Word? If the answer is yes, in what way has this helped you?